



Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 14 October 2024 at 5.30 pm

Members Suite - 4th Floor, Brent Civic Centre,
Engineers Way, Wembley, HA9 0FJ

This meeting will be held as an in person physical meeting with all members of the Committee required to attend in person.

The press and public will be excluded from this meeting.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Grahl (Chair)
Dixon
Gbajumo
Hirani
Vacancy

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Chappell, Conneely, Kennelly
and Rubin

Councillor: Kansagra and Mistry

For further information contact: Hannah O'Brien, Senior Governance Officer
020 8937 1339, hannah.o'brien@brent.gov.uk

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit: **www.brent.gov.uk/democracy**

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also a Prejudicial Interest (i.e. it affects a financial position or relates to determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission, or registration) then (unless an exception at 14(2) of the Members Code applies), after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences**- Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

(a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party of trade union).

(b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting, to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral ward affected by the decision, the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who employs or has appointed any of these or in whom they have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000, or any firm in which they are a partner, or any company of which they are a director
- any body of a type described in (a) above.

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item **Page**

1 Exclusion of the Press and Public

The committee is advised that the public may be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely in view of the nature of the proceedings that exempt information would be disclosed. Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are attended by representatives of Care In Action (CIA), the council's Children in Care Council. The committee is therefore recommended to exclude the press and public for the duration of the meeting, as the attendance of CIA representatives necessitates the disclosure of the following category of exempt information, set out in the Local Government Act 1972: - information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

Members are also asked to note that the following items are not for publication as they relate to the category of exempt information set out below, as specified under Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

Agenda Item 8: Report from Brent Care Leavers on Care as a Protected Characteristic - Appendix 1 (Care Leavers Report).

This appendix has been classified as exempt under Paragraph 2 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely: "Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual"

2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

3 Declarations of interests

Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary or personal interests in the items on this agenda.

4 Deputations (if any)

To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.

5 Minutes of the previous meeting

1 - 8

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.

6 Matters arising (if any)

To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

7 Update from Care In Action / Care Leavers in Action Representatives

This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) to feedback on recent activity.

8 Report from Brent Care Leavers on Care as a Protected Characteristic 9 - 18

To receive a report from Brent Care Leavers and Brent Participation Team regarding views on the Council agreeing to make care experience a protected characteristic.

9 Bright Spots Survey Presentation 19 - 116

To receive a summary of the 'bright spots' survey results for Brent children who are looked after and the plans to address areas of development. The item will be presented by young people and the Participation Team.

10 Updated Care Leaver Offer and Care Leaver Charter 117 - 136

To receive the updated Care Leaver Offer and Care Leaver Charter prior to its publication.

11 Brent Adoption 6 Monthly Report - 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 137 - 151

To receive information in relation to adoption performance, progress and activity of Adopt London West, and good outcomes being achieved for children.

12 Annual Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Report 2023-24 153 - 164

To receive information regarding the contribution of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assuring and improvement of services for Looked After Children (LAC). This report is for information only.

13 Brent Fostering Service six-monthly Monitoring Report - 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 165 - 183

To receive information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children, in

accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

14 Any other urgent business

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Deputy Director – Democratic Services or their representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

Date of the next meeting: Monday 3 February 2025

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MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Monday 15 July 2024 at 5.00 pm
Held in the Members' Suite, Brent Civic Centre

PRESENT: Councillors Grahl (Chair), Collymore, Gbajumo and Hirani

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies were received from the following:

- Councillor Liz Dixon

3. Declarations of interests

None.

4. Deputations (if any)

None.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 29 April 2024, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. Matters arising (if any)

None.

7. Update from Care In Action / Care Leavers in Action Representatives

Alice Weavers (Participation and Engagement Manager, Brent Council) opened the session with a workshop which considered care experience as a protected characteristic. She explained that in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care by Josh McAlister, a recommendation was made for care experience to be a protected characteristic in the same way as other protected characteristics such as race, gender and disability. The government did not take that recommendation on board nationally, but the recommendation did lead to conversations in local authorities reviewing what could be done locally to support care experienced young

people. In introducing the discussion, she highlighted that at least 63 local authorities had now adopted policies with care experience as a protected characteristic, which would mean that all reports with Equality Impact Assessments would need to consider their impact on children and young people with care experience. Other Councils had used it as an opportunity to launch new initiatives for care experienced young people. For example, Camden Council had launched free WiFi access for care leavers under 25. Across the country, there was some confusion about what it would mean for the Council to consider care experience as a protected characteristic with no general consensus across the piece nationally or regionally. As such, she asked those present to consider what it would mean for Brent in terms of people's work, their colleagues, and for children and young people if this policy were to be implemented in Brent.

During the discussion, concerns were raised in relation to disclosure and the risk of discrimination or stigma. Young people felt that disclosing their care experience may cause discrimination against them due to societal stigma, but it was highlighted that to have care experience as a protected characteristic would mean that they would be protected from discrimination and would be able to challenge where they felt discriminated against. The policy could also be used as an opportunity to break stigma and take a zero-tolerance approach to discriminatory behaviour.

NHS colleagues highlighted that local providers would likely be willing to adopt the policy of having care experience as a protected characteristic if the Council took a lead in that. This would mean that those with care experience would automatically be guaranteed an interview during recruitment processes if they met the relevant experience criteria and disclosed on their equal opportunities form that they were care experienced. There were also staff networks to support those with protected characteristics to come together, which included campaigns and events such as LGBT+ month and International Women's Day, which would mean those with care experience would be given supported opportunities to come together in a similar way.

It was highlighted it was not clear to young people what this policy would mean tangibly, with a suggestion for the phrase and terminology to change so that it was easier to understand. The policy could be used for lobbying for more offers for care experienced young people such as free WiFi and free travel. As well as this, services would need to consider care experience when planning their services alongside the other protected characteristics.

The next steps would be to come to a decision as to whether care experience was a protected characteristic and, if so, ask the Committee to endorse that approach and the work that was happening to make care a protected characteristic. The policy could then be presented to Full Council.

The Committee then moved on to updates from CIA / CLIA representatives.

K highlighted the interview panels she had been part of for participation staff and leaving care staff. She advised the Committee it had been a good and insightful opportunity which had built her confidence and also helped with her own interviews. CLIA was also involved in a commissioning project for the independent reviewer contract and she had provided feedback for that. A residential was planned for July. Previously, this had been to the Gordon Brown Centre, but most care leavers had

already done that residential a few times so had been looking for an alternative. This time they would be going to a lake and taking part in some outdoor activities.

N informed the Committee that CIA / CLIA would be launching a Participation Strategy.

S updated the Committee on the London Borough of Culture 'Seen and Heard' project that she had been involved in since 2019. In 2020, 5 apprentices had been selected to design a space that was being built for young people, and the space those apprentices had designed had won a Euro Cities Award. Two young people had then travelled to Brussels to collect that award. On 15 February 2024 there had been a presentation in Brent Civic Centre which demonstrated how they had won the award. Being part of this project had given S the opportunity to build her knowledge and skills and work with clients such as Quintain, LSE and other young people.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and **RESOLVED:**

That the updates by the representatives of Care in Action/Care Leavers in Action be noted.

8. **Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2023-24**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced a report which provided a summary of the activity alongside strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- The highest priority the previous year had been to address issues around staff recruitment and retention, particularly of social workers. There had been big moves forward in recruiting permanent social workers over the last year, compared to the previous year where the LAC teams were holding 1/3 of vacancies.
- The improvements in recruitment and retention had been done through a range of actions including recruiting through specialist agencies, recruiting internationally and newly qualified social workers.
- Over the reporting year the Council had continued to work with health partners to improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Focused work had been undertaken to ensure young people had access to their health histories when leaving care and embedding in practice that updated health information booklets were provided.
- The participation offer had been improved over the last year with an updated participation strategy. The Council was working with Barnardo's through Brent Care Journeys which had finished last month, and there was now a transition period to 'Brent Care Journeys 2.0' which was due to launch in Autumn 2024.
- Work was being done on accommodation pathways and developing independent skills for care leavers.

- A Bright Spots survey had taken place and the Council was awaiting the results of that.
- The social work service continued to work on life story work for children in care and would keep this as a priority as the Council moved into the new reporting year. There was bespoke training available on life story work through WEST. The service was exploring IT platforms to improve that work with children and their carers.
- Three-monthly case summaries had been introduced for all children in care.

The Chair thanked Kelli Eboji for her introduction and invited contributions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

CLIA asked about the work on accommodation pathways. Kelli Eboji explained that the service was looking to expand the ways young people could move out into independence alongside promoting an independence programme as part of ASDAN.

CLIA asked what support was available for care leavers at university during the holiday periods when they had no access to their student loan. Kelli Eboji would get back to CLIA regarding their entitlements, highlighting that there was support available for care leavers during the holiday periods through rent payments, accommodation and subsistence depending on the needs of the care leaver. The support offer was tailored due to individual nuances which could cause confusion over entitlements. Kelli Eboji would work with the leaving care teams to improve the communications around the support offer to make it clearer for care leavers.

CLIA noted that the number of young people post-16 in employment, education or training had not changed from the previous year and highlighted that many children in care and care leavers found their education disrupted, resulting in poorer attainment than some would have wanted. CLIA added that the government no longer funded young people to return to education to improve their qualifications, and asked whether there was any financial or career support available to support young people to return to education to advance their careers. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) highlighted that this could be raised through the Brent Virtual School. If re-taking GCSEs or A-Levels was part of the young persons pathway as part of their career progression then he believed the Council should be supporting that. More generally in relation to education, employment and training, officers added that the Council department ran an apprenticeship programme that was made available to care leavers.

In relation to the paid Care Quality Ambassadors positions, the Committee hoped these would be further developed so that they could do more. Members were advised that those ambassadors had only just started doing semi-independent provision inspections so the role was still in development. Officers agreed that the service should be creative with those roles and how the ambassadors could be used to expand into other areas. Those inspections of accommodation for 16+ would take a while to complete as that provision was now regulated by Ofsted therefore there was a need for young people to be thorough and cover the vast range of providers.

The Committee was encouraged that the Council was now collecting further information on children and young people going missing. Based on return home interviews, members asked whether there were any key learnings or commonalities coming out of that about why children and young people were going missing. Kelli Eboji explained that return home interviews were standard practice and conducted routinely for young people returning from missing. She advised that each reason was unique to that young person, and often young people who went missing were particularly vulnerable to child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and had connections with other young people who were vulnerable to exploitation and high risk activity. Where young people came out of their families and were in a placement with a lack of relationship or connection, the pull to people they felt connected with was strong which at times leads to them going missing from placement. The Social Worker Practice Consultant role leads on co-ordinating and overseeing missing and vulnerable adolescents in order to build up a rapport and be that consistent presence. This allowed for more quality information from the young person and enabled more robust planning with the professional network in terms of supporting the young person to sustain their placement and avoid them going missing.

The Committee noted the aim of completing care proceedings within 26 weeks, but highlighted that the report showed Brent going beyond those 26 weeks and the national average. Members asked what was being done to meet the national average with an overall aim of meeting the 26-week deadline. Kelli Eboji affirmed that the Council's goal was always to complete care proceedings within 26 weeks, but the last few years had presented challenges. During Covid, court hearings had moved online and this had created significant delays in proceedings. Some cases went beyond 50 weeks because of their complexities such as international issues, fact finding and criminal matters. The service hoped to bring that backlog of court cases down over the coming year now that the courts were fully open and face to face. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) added that there were similar patterns of delays in other local authorities who used the West London Family Courts. Brent Council escalated issues with the courts where needed. The Committee asked for a percentage figure for the reasons behind delays for future reports of this nature.

In relation to the chart in section 6.4 of the report detailing the number of children who had 3 or more placements, the Committee asked whether there was anything being done about the number of placements they were having. Officers explained that the service did its best to minimise the disruption of placement changes. Some of those placement changes were not always due to placement breakdowns but could be because the young person was moving to a family member or coming out of care to return to their parents. To alleviate the impacts of placement changes, placement matching and sufficiency, as well as increasing the number of placements, was important, so officers were working closely on the West London Fostering Hub to try to recruit more foster carers. The Committee requested information on the percentage figures of placement moves that happened for positive reasons.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

9. Annual LAC Health Reports 2022-2023 and 2023-2024

Kim Lewis (Head of Clinical Services, Brent Children - CLCH) introduced the report, which provided the annual Looked After Children (LAC) Health Reports for 2022-23 and 2023-24. In introducing the reports, she highlighted the following key points:

- The CLCH LAC health team worked closely together with the wider system to improve outcomes for children and young people. The portfolio had sat within CLCH since 2021.
- During 2022-23 the LAC health team had supported 369 children at year end, which was an 8% increase from the previous year. The Royal College Intercollegiate Framework provided guidance on nursing staff provision per LAC and this was monitored closely by CLCH to ensure compliance.
- The Committee were advised, however, that the recruitment of nurses into the service had been challenging during that reporting period. There was a high number of agency and bank staff use and mutual aid available through CLCH, as well as assistance from the other boroughs that CLCH were providers for. Those staffing issues were now resolved and a full permanent team was in place, with final recruits now being onboarded and inducted which would lead to more consistency.
- Due to the staffing challenges experienced, there had been a pause of health team attendance at some meetings so that the service could ensure core health plans for children and young people were completed, and the team was now in the process of stepping that attendance back up.
- The timeliness of health assessments for 2022-23 showed that 92% had been completed on time. Some of the challenges for completion were around waiting for appointments from hosting boroughs, re-booking of appointments where the child was not brought to the appointment, and timely information transfers between the health team and the Council LAC team. A meeting was scheduled to look into that challenge and come up with a solution to improve that process.
- Section 5.2 of the report detailed the number of LAC children registered with a GP, which was 97% for 2022-23. Final data was not yet available for 2023-24 but the health team continued to work closely to register children and young people. For those young people who did not want to register with a GP the health team signposted to alternatives.
- Section 5.11 detailed the patient experience measure results which asked 'is this a good service' to which 95% agreed or strongly agreed.
- The health service was undertaking a quality improvement process, working with children and young people, to create an animation about the LAC health service to showcase the support available and dispel common myths about the LAC population. The video would be aimed at children and young people themselves as well as those who may have inaccuracies in their views of LAC. Children and young people had been very involved in that project which was due to launch in January 2025.
- The reports also included a summary of service improvements and challenges, including improvements to networking with system wide partners, assigning specialist roles to individual nurses in LAC to develop

specialist support within the team, future provision of training, system improvements to the interpreter's booking system, and improved information sharing between teams.

The Chair thanked officers for the updates and then invited comments and questions from Committee members with the following raised:

The Committee highlighted section 5.5, table 6 of the report, which detailed the overall percentage of children who had received dental and optician health checks. They highlighted this seemed low and asked if the service was doing anything to increase those numbers to hit the target of 95%. Kim Lewis advised members that GPs could not undertake dental and optical checks so the health service was required to work with children and young people to encourage them to access opticians and dentists. Julia Blankson (Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children in Brent - CLCH) would have a plan for that process. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that this was discussed as part of the child's health assessment when they entered into care and their carers registered the child with opticians and dentists. That gap in performance was often due to the young person refusing appointments, as well as some cohorts moving placements and therefore changing providers often.

In relation to the low immunisation rates, the Committee was advised that GPs held records for immunisations which health providers did not have immediate access to and needed to request that information. There was a large cohort of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) where there was no immunisations record and the health service was required to start again to ensure they were fully vaccinated. With that, there was slower take-up due to differences in understanding of immunisations and LAC cohort typically having a higher percentage of parents refusing immunisations for their child. Data collection was a difficult part of this process. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) added that Brent had a high number of children in care under a Section 20, which meant the Council did not have direct parental responsibility for them in the same way it would for a child with a Care Order. In most cases, the local authority tried to work with the parent to encourage the uptake of immunisations but if the parent refused then the immunisations could not be provided.

The Committee asked whether there was a high number of children in the LAC cohort with diabetes. Kelli Eboji responded that there was not a large cohort of children in care with diabetes currently, but that was always monitored as there had been a large number in the past and the cohort was regularly changing. In the past, when there were high levels of diabetes in the LAC population, there had been targeted work alongside health partners to support those children and young people.

The Committee commended the forward planning section of the report, particularly the possibility of commissioning a care leavers health service post-18. Members asked what would be required to move that proposal forward. Trish Stewart (Director of Safeguarding - CLCH) advised members that there was a review happening across the whole of NWL of LAC services, looking at writing a new service specification everyone would adhere to, which could incorporate that post-

18 support. Some other London boroughs had a post-18 nurse and she could see that added value of that.

Nigel Chapman asked how the role of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) affected CLCH and whether there was a case to be made in relation to equity of funding or resource in Brent compared to other NWL boroughs. Kim Lewis advised members that, because they were guided by the Royal College Intercollegiate Framework which stipulated how teams should be staffed based on case numbers, the resource allocations were fairly standard across the piece and there was a formula for that. What differed was the details in the service specification around which populations fell within the remit of the service. For example, in Brent, if a child was placed outside of the M25 then there would be a reliance on the hosting borough to do health assessments, but some boroughs were commissioned to travel anywhere in the country to complete health assessments. This caused challenges in terms of operational capacity to do that as well as understanding the local services available in different areas of the country to signpost. Trish Stewart added that there was now an annual LAC Away Day for services across the boroughs CLCH provided for, where it was common practice to listen to each borough and hear what they were doing differently and how the ICB shared information with them. As there were differences, CLCH were looking at putting an agreement in place in terms of governance processes and reporting.

In terms of information sharing, the Committee heard that there may be ways to share certain information between CLCH and the local authority now that the Health Information Exchange was running.

RESOLVED:


- i) To note the content of the reports.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6:50 pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL
Chair

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 14 October 2024
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Care as a Protected Characteristic	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Part Exempt – Appendix 1 is exempt from publication as it contains exempt information as specified in Paragraph 1, Part 2, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely: “Information which is likely to reveal an individual”.
List of Appendices:	1. Young Peoples Report- Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning and Development Nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. At the July 2024 Corporate Parenting Committee, the Participation team were asked to work with young people to present a report to the October 2024 Committee outlining their views on whether Brent should adopt “care experience as a protected characteristic”. This cover report provides background information to the report that was prepared by young people (Appendix 1).

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Corporate Parenting Committee consider:
- Whether to support Brent adopting the concept of care experience as a protected characteristic.
 - If this is adopted, that agreement is given to support and explore ‘care experience’ having a similar status to other protected characteristics. It is proposed that this work aligns with concurrent corporate activity to review Equality Impact

Assessments (EIA) and explore the adoption of the socio-economic duty – Section 1 of the Equality Act (2010).

- If adopted, agree that young people have a key role in monitoring the practical implementation of care experience as a protected characteristic.

3. Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

3.1.1 This activity contributes to the Borough priorities outlined below:

- **The Best Start in Life**

Recognising care experience as a protected characteristic will enable Brent to ensure that care experienced children and young people receive the support they need and are not stigmatised or excluded from opportunities due to their care experience. This aligns to the borough plan priority for parents, children and young people to get the best start in life.

- **Prosperity and Stability**

Adopting care experience as a protected characteristic will aim to tackle inequality and disproportionality for care experienced young people by ensuring that all council decision making considers care experienced young people.

- **A Healthier Brent**

In order for care experienced children and young people to have good health outcomes, social determinants of health such as inequalities in housing, employment and income must be addressed. Adopting care experience as a protected characteristic will provide the council with a formal mechanism to ensure all decision making routinely considers the impact on care experienced young people.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 The Equality Act 2010 protects individuals from discrimination based on characteristics such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

3.2.2 In May 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (IRCSC) published its final report to Government: [The independent review of children's social care: final report](#). The IRCSC considered the current experience of care, including the experience of people who had been in care. The review included detailed consultation with young people and partner agencies both statutory and voluntary. The final report recommended that Government should make care experience a protected characteristic.

3.2.3 The report noted: *This stigma and discrimination (of being in care) can be explicit, and often comes with assumptions about the likely characteristics of children and adults that have care experience. They can also be implicit and are evidenced in the way care experience is discussed in schools, workplaces, and the media. At its worst this can lead to care experienced people being refused employment, failing to succeed in education or facing unfair judgements about their ability to parent when they have children and families of their own'...Therefore, the government should make care experience a protected characteristic.*

3.2.4 The Government of the time chose not to implement this recommendation, but local authorities across the country are taking their own action to adopt this principle within their local authority policy and procedural arrangements.

- 3.2.5 There is a growing movement to recognise children who have been in local authority care, also known as “care experienced” children, as needing to be included within protected characteristic status. The movement seeks to address the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by children in care and advocate for their right to be protected and supported in the same way as other marginalized groups.
- 3.2.6 In 2023 the Children’s commissioner launched a survey asking all care experienced individuals their view on whether care experience should be a protected characteristic.
- 3.2.7 In October 2023 the commissioner published an update: [Should care experience be a protected characteristic? | Children’s Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/should-care-experience-be-a-protected-characteristic/)
- 3.2.8 The commissioner noted that, *“Some of the arguments in favour from responses so far include: that care experience has a life-long impact, that it could bring change and give care experienced people a voice, and it could prevent discrimination, spark conversations and empower people who have experienced discrimination or trauma”*.
- 3.2.9 However, the commissioner did acknowledge that some care experienced young people had expressed concerns about making care experience a protected characteristic. *“Some of the arguments against care experience becoming a protected characteristic in responses so far include: it could result in more discrimination and stigmatisation, that being in care is a positive rather than a negative, and that people want separation from being care experienced”*.
- 3.2.10 In 2019 Renfrewshire Council in Scotland became the first council to formally adopt care experience as a protected characteristic. In January 2023 Lambeth became the first London local authority to adopt care experience as a protected characteristic and thereby formally recognise the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by care experienced children and young people. Since then, several other London local authorities have made this commitment. These include Camden, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow, Islington, Kingston, Newham, Redbridge, Richmond upon Thames, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest.
- 3.2.11 Some of the initiatives that have been implemented by councils recognising care experience as a protected characteristic include Renfrewshire establishing a Care Experience Bursary Fund to provide financial support for care experienced young people pursuing higher education; Camden agreeing to provide free Wi-Fi to all Camden care leavers up until 25 whether they are in council housing, in private rented accommodation, or other accommodation, to further support those with care experience.
- 3.2.12 The London Care Leavers Compact was established in 2022 to deliver a consistent and high-quality offer for care leavers across the capital, demonstrating a commitment to providing greater equity of provision across a range of services from housing to travel. This was previously presented at Corporate Parenting Committee on 16th October 2023. It covered a range of issues and Brent has fully implemented all aspects of the main areas of the compact.

Developments in Brent

- 3.2.13 At the July 2024 Corporate Parenting Committee, the Participation team and a small group of care experienced young people facilitated a workshop discussing Brent

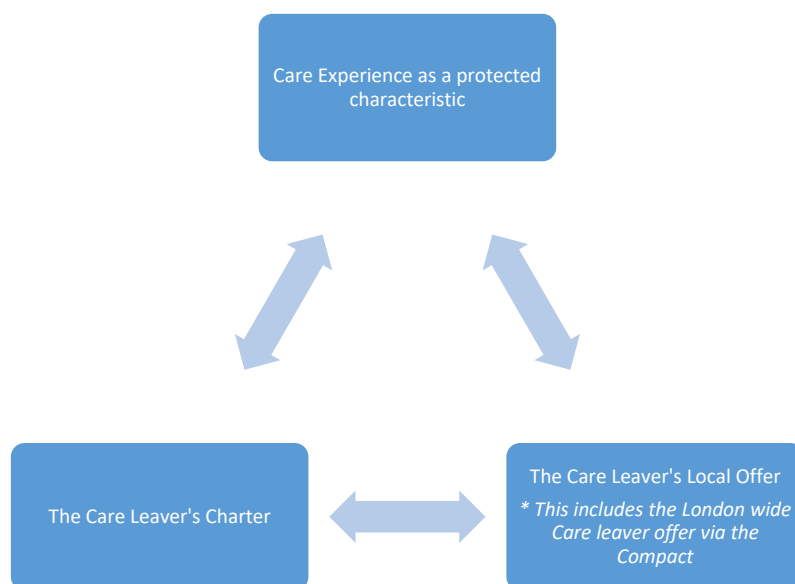
adopting care experience as a protected characteristic. Young people expressed some concerns that this policy would mean they have to disclose their status and worried that this may further stigmatise them. They were reassured when explained that this was not the case and were encouraged when discussing ways that they could in fact be protected. The concerns that were expressed align with findings from the Children's Commissioner's survey of care experienced young people's views on adopting care experience as a protected characteristic.

3.2.14 The workshop discussions underlined that there remains some uncertainty as to what implications there would be for the Council in adopting care experience as a protected characteristic. Young people expressed that if this was adopted, they would want clarity about what exactly it would mean and how this would be monitored.

3.2.15 Since July, the Brent Participation team have worked with young people to discuss this issue and hear their view about the merits of this policy, as well as how they would want it practically implemented and what they would like it to look like in Brent. Attached is the report prepared on 24th September by a group of Care Leavers following consultation with the wider care experienced population and research by the group.

3.2.16 Young people researched what had been done by other councils and considered what they would want to happen in Brent. Many of the examples given in the young people's paper relate to specific benefits that they want to see offered to care leavers. Also submitted to this month's Corporate Parenting Committee is the updated Care Leaver's Local Offer and the Care Leavers' charter. Graph 1 below, depicts the relationship between the three.

Figure 1



3.2.17 Care as a protected characteristic provides an overarching principle by which the Council would operate, ensuring that care experienced children and young people are not discriminated against.

The Local Offer provides information about what services and support are available to all Brent Care Leavers from all partner agencies and shows the practical connection of the overarching principle to practical examples of what services will be provided. The Care Leavers' Charter provides the Local Authority commitment to care leavers, outlining how we work together and our promises to young people.

In effect there is a dotted line between these three documents and the monitoring of the offer and charter will in turn provide a mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of care as protected characteristic.

3.2.18 Should the Corporate Parenting Board support the adoption of care as a protected characteristic, it is proposed that this change will align with concurrent corporate activity to review Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) and explore the adoption of the socio-economic duty (Section 1, Equality Act 2010). The timeframe for finalising this is early 2025. The existing work to review the Council's EIAs aims to improve the process, approach, associated guidance and consistency of completed EIAs. Additionally, adopting the socio-economic duty would require the organisation to consider ways in which decisions increase or decrease inequalities that result from socio-economic disadvantage, similar to the due regard given to the current 9 protected characteristics. As part of the overarching EIA review, both 'care experience' and 'socioeconomic status' would feature as characteristics that require active consideration.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Significant involvement with care experienced young people has taken place in formulating this document and considering how best to implement the approach, aligning it to the updated Care Leavers' Offer and Charter.

4.2 Consideration will be given to presenting this proposal to Full Council for adoption, supported by young people. As detailed in section 3.2.18 this would need to be done in tandem with the wider changes to the EIA review.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 The proposal to consider "care experience" as a protected characteristic has not been adopted by the government and as such, has no legal status. The proposal is considered to be an "overarching principle" and will not result in additional financial commitments. The proposal is linked to the "Local Offer" that details the levels of support currently provided by the Council for Care Leavers. Any future proposed changes to the Local Offer will be reviewed to assess the potential financial implications for the Council.

5.2 There could be some additional considerations required in terms of considering this characteristic when Council officers undertake EDI assessments and other similar work, but it is assumed that this will be done within existing resources.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 Currently, the Equality Act (EA) 2010 provides the legal framework to protect the rights of individuals with the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment

- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

6.2 Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010 as set out above list the nine protected characteristics and people with those characteristics are afforded rights in relation to discrimination on the grounds of those characteristics.

6.3 There is no legal basis to prohibit the Council from including 'Care Leaver' to the list to be considered locally in its Equalities Impact Assessments. Indeed, the general Public Sector Equality Duty aim is to ensure public authorities have due regard to the need to:

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

6.4 However, in the event that there is a conflicting impact between 'Care Leaver' and any of the statutory protected characteristics, then the statutory protected characteristics must take precedence.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 Adopting 'care experience' as a protected characteristic would have considerable equality implications for the Council, as all decision making will need to routinely consider the impact on care experienced young people in the same way it already does with the nine other protected characteristics. Should care experience be adopted as a protected characteristic by the Council, then it would be added to the organisation's Equality Impact Assessments, which would ensure that any proposals or changes to services actively consider the implications for care experienced people. Similarly, care experience would be added to the equality considerations when the Council considers internal and external policies, procuring goods and services, service provision, and recruitment, promotion, and performance management of employees.

7.2 This means adoption will need to be complemented by effective socialisation, awareness raising and possibly training to ensure officers and decision makers understand how to actively consider care experienced young people in their ideas, proposals, projects and decisions.

7.3 Overall, this would have a positive impact on the Council's equality responsibilities, as it will ensure that the needs of people who have experience of care, often a vulnerable group, are given consideration from Council in a holistic way.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change and environmental considerations at this stage.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 There are no Human Resource or Property considerations at this stage.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 As detailed in section 7.2 adoption of care experience as a protected characteristic will need to be complemented by effective socialisation, awareness raising and possibly training to ensure officers and decision makers understand how to actively consider care experienced young people in their ideas, proposals, projects and decisions.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman


Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 14 October 2024
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Bright Spots Survey	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	1. Bright Spots Survey 'Your Life, Your Care'
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning and Development Nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an analysis of the Bright Spots Survey 'Your Life, Your Care'. This is a survey of the views of looked after children and young people aged 4-17yrs.
- 1.2 This report will be presented to Corporate Parenting Committee on 14 October 2024 (See appendix 1).

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to consider the findings from the Bright Spots survey and agree the resulting action plan.

3. Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

3.1.1 Coram Voice states that *“The Bright Spots Programme is a research and service improvement project run by Coram Voice. The Programme was set up to understand what is important to children in care and care leavers and share learning about what makes life good for them”*.

3.1.2 This activity contributes to all five Borough priorities through better understanding and responding to the holistic needs and views of care experienced children and young people.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 Brent has, over several years, partnered with Coram Voice to complete the Bright Spots survey with care experienced children and care leavers.

3.2.2 Findings are split into two separate reports Your Life, Your Care (for those aged 4-17) and Your Life Beyond Care (for Care Leavers). To date, Brent has only received the completed report from Coram for Your Life, Your Care. This report therefore focusses on the plan for presentation of this report. Your Life Beyond Care is scheduled to be shared in November 2024.

3.2.3 Coram Voice created the Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators to put children’s experiences and voice at the heart of how they measure subjective well-being. The indicators are measured by the ‘Your Life, Your Care’ survey. The survey was developed from literature reviews, roundtable discussions with professionals and from focus groups and individual interviews with 140 looked after children and young people living in nine different local authorities. The survey identifies the areas where children in care are doing well and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children and young people’s experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

3.2.4 Between 1 March and 30 April 2023 and again between 11 October 2023 and 29 March 2024, all Brent children in care aged 4-17yrs were asked to take part in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives.

Summary of key messages from “Your life, your care” survey 2023-24

3.2.5 Below is a brief synopsis of the response rate and the changes since the last report.

3.2.6 The survey was completed by 82 children in care, aged 4-17, presenting an overall response rate of 32%. There were three different versions of the survey tailored for different age groups: 4-7, 8-11 and 11-17. The response rate was 30% for 4-7 years, 50% for 8-11 years and 29% for 11-17 years. The results are presented across the age groups and individually for each group.

3.2.7 The report explains that “Bright Spot” indicates a ‘good news’ story – a positive aspect of practice. This indicates children and young people are doing significantly better than children in care in other local authorities, or

reports the same as, or higher, well-being than their peers in the general population.

3.2.8 The report states that 6 of the Bright Spots that were awarded in the 2020-21 survey were awarded again this year. These were: trusting your social worker, trusting the adults you live with, liking school, support for learning, feeling safe at home, and happiness with appearance.

3.2.9 In addition, an impressive additional 12 Bright Spots have been awarded this year. These are:

- Happiness yesterday (4-7yrs)
- Liking your bedroom (4-7yrs)
- Feeling settled at home (4-7yrs)
- Having a trusted adult (8-11yrs)
- Knowing identity of social worker (8-11yrs)
- Sensitive parenting (8-11yrs)
- Placement continuity (11-17yrs)
- Social worker continuity (11-17yrs)
- Access to nature (11-17yrs)
- Reason for care explained (11-17yrs)
- Sharing confidences (11-17yrs)
- Positivity about the future (11-17yrs)

3.2.10 The report also notes several other areas, which although not attracting a Bright Spot showed notable improvement since the last survey.

4-7yrs:

- Knowing the identity of your social worker (73% - 83%)
- Having an explanation from an adult for why you are in care (18% - 42%)

8-11yrs:

- Feeling that life is getting better (72% - 94%)
- Not feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying (69% - 81%)
- Happiness yesterday (75% - 81%)

11-17yrs:

- Feeling that family time is 'just right': Mum (25% - 36%); Dad (13% - 19%); brothers and sisters (30% - 38%)
- Spending time outdoors in nature (86% - 96%)
- Having an explanation from an adult for why you are in care (72% - 96%)
- Feeling the adults you live with notice your feelings (83% - 91%).

3.2.11 There were some domains within the survey which showed a reduction in positive response, meaning less favourable findings, which were:

4-7yrs:

- Having a really good friend (100% - 92%); Liking school (91% - 83%); Having fun at the weekends (100% - 91%)

8-11yrs:

- Feeling that family time is 'just right': Mum (46% - 27%); brothers and sisters (58% - 44%); Having a pet at home (41% - 31%); Trusting the adults you live with (96% - 88%); Feeling the adults you live with take an interest in what you do at school (100% - 88%); 'Always' feeling settled where you live (74% - 56%); Worrying about your feelings or behaviour (52% - 69%)

11-17yrs:

- Having a pet at home (31% - 19%); Feeling that life is getting better (88% - 74%); Getting chances to show you can be trusted (96% - 87%); Practising life skills (90% - 81%); Feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying (14% - 22%); Liking your bedroom (95% - 89%); Feeling happy yesterday – moderate-high (76% - 61%); Feeling satisfied with your life as a whole – moderate-high (74% - 62%); Feeling the things you do in life are worthwhile – moderate-high (79% - 61%).

3.2.12 A full summary of the report will be co-presented by the Participation team and members of Brent Care Journey's 2.0 at Corporate Parenting Committee on the 14 October 2024.

3.2.13 In addition the full report is attached to this report (appendix 1).

3.2.14 Children and young people in Brent Care Journeys 2.0 will review the findings of the report in a workshop. They will explore the findings to understand the views of their peers and use the data to think about potential solutions to some of the areas of development. This could be coming up with ideas for projects and initiatives to improve life in care for children and young people. The group will work with the relevant teams in CYP to feedback their recommendations.

4. Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 The report, Your Life, Your Care 2023-24 (appendix 1), will be summarised into a PowerPoint presentation that will be jointly presented by the Participation team and Brent Care Journey's 2.0 at the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting in October 2024.

4.2 The presentation will include an *initial* improvement plan to address issues raised in the report.

5. Financial Considerations

5.1 In order to take part in both Bright Spots Your life, Your Care (4-17 years) and the Your Life Beyond Care (care experienced young adults) Brent paid Coram Voice a total of £15,500, £7,750 per survey. The cost incurred paid for the branding, the materials, access to the online survey, guidance on how to support young people through the process, detailed analysis of findings by

experienced research analysts; a full report and support with dissemination and service development.

6. Legal Considerations

6.1 The Children Act 1989 and 2004 emphasises the importance of listening to children and taking their views into account when making decisions about their care. The Bright Spots survey aligns with the Children Act's focus on improving outcomes for children, the survey seeks to identify what works well and what needs improvement thereby helping to shape better services and support systems.

6.2 Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasis that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them. The Bright Spots survey aligns with this principle by providing children with a platform to share their experiences and opinions.

7. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 At this stage there are no specific Equality implications.

8. Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 At this stage there are no specific Climate and environmental implications.

9. Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 At this stage there are no specific human resources/property implications.

10. Communication Considerations

10.1 There will be further consultation work with care experienced children where findings from the report will be shared and key campaigns agreed to address areas of focus identified by the report.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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Your Life, Your Care

***A survey of the views of looked
after children and young
people aged 4-17yrs.***

Brent

July 2024

Dr. Sarah Meakings

About the Bright Spots Programme



The Bright Spots Programme is a research and service improvement project run by Coram Voice. The Programme was set up to understand what is important to children in care and care leavers and share learning about what makes life good for them.

Official statistics on care-experienced children and young people give only a partial picture of their lives. Data focuses on adult perspectives using objective outcomes measures – e.g. placement types and educational attainment. This information does not tell us about how children and young people feel: are they happy, safe and feel they are doing well?

The Bright Spots Programme takes a different approach by measuring subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is defined as feeling good and doing well at an individual and interpersonal level. Measuring subjective well-being enables us to understand children's experience of care by putting their voice at the centre.

Bright Spots helps local authorities (LAs) systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them. We work to ensure that the views and experiences of children are at the heart of decisions that are made about their lives.

About the Your Life, Your Care survey

The Bright Spots Programme was developed in collaboration with Professor Julie Selwyn at the University of Oxford with funding from the Hadley Trust. As part of the development process, we created the *Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators* which put children's experiences and voice at the heart of how we measure subjective well-being.

The indicators are measured by the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey. The survey was developed from literature reviews, roundtable discussions with professionals and from focus groups and individual interviews with 140 looked after children and young people living in nine different local authorities.

The survey identifies the areas where children in care are doing well and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children and young people's experience and well-being to inform service improvements.



Measuring subjective well-being

Subjective well-being:

- Subjective well-being in this survey refers to children's own evaluations of how they feel about their lives.
- There are questions in the surveys about affect (e.g. how happy a child feels now), cognitive judgements (e.g. evaluations of relationships) and the inner world (e.g. life having meaning).
- In addition to questions that measure overarching well-being indicators (happiness, life satisfaction etc.) the survey covers four domains that are important to children and young people: Relationships, Resilience, Rights and Recovery.
- All these elements help us understand if children are flourishing in care.

Bright Spots well-being indicators



About this report

- This report outlines the findings from the ‘Your Life, Your Care’ surveys for children in care in Brents aged 4-17yrs.

On some pages of this report, you will see a ‘**Bright Spots**’ icon (top right of page), and a yellow text box. This indicates a ‘good news’ story – a positive aspect of practice in your LA. This is where children and young people are doing significantly better than children in care in other LAs or report the same as or higher well-being than their peers in the general population.

We also highlight with a grey text box where young people are doing significantly less well compared to children in care in other LAs, or where results are markedly less favourable than in the general population. This may be an area to focus on in service development.

If we have not highlighted a difference the findings are in line with the results in other LAs.

Light yellow text boxes showcase comparative data from similar surveys and give context and background information about what children and young people told us about their lives in the development phase of the survey.



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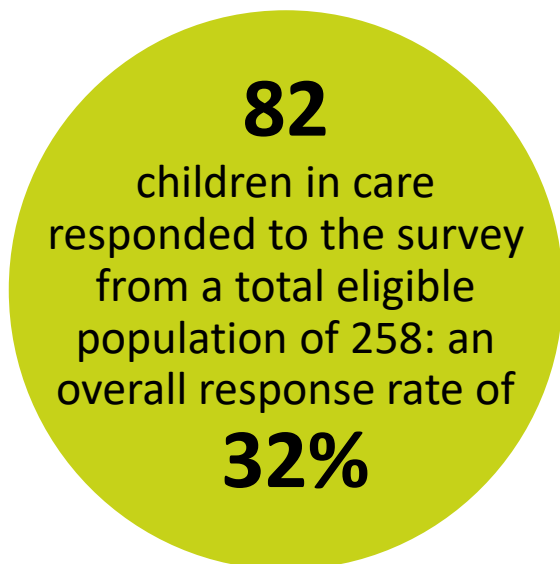
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**Section 1:

Key findings**

Your Life, Your Care 2023-24

The views of children in care aged 4-17 in Brent on their well-being



Between 1 March and 30 April 2023 and again between 11 October 2023 and 29 March 2024, all children in care aged 4-17yrs were asked to take part in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives. This is a summary of the findings.

- More girls (53%) than boys (46%) responded to the survey. One (1%) chose the 'let me tell you' option.
- The most common ethnicity was Black (35%), followed by Mixed Ethnicity (21%).
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) were in foster care, about one-fifth (21%) were in family and friends care. Others lived in residential care, with parents, or 'somewhere else' – most often in semi-independent accommodation.
- Most often (41%), the children and young people had been in care for between 1-3 years.

Age group	Number of responses	Response rate
4-7yrs	12	30%
8-11yrs	16	50%
11-17yrs	54	29%

What is working well?



Placement continuity

- Young people (11-17yrs) in Brent were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to have **stayed in the same placement since going into care** (55% vs. 34%)*.



Bedroom (4-7yrs)

- All (100%, n=12) children aged 4-7yrs reported **liking their bedroom***.



Sharing confidences

- Four fifths (80%) of young people (11-17yrs) **talked regularly with their carers/ parents about things that mattered to them**. The same is true for 66% of young people in the general population*.



Sensitive parenting (8-11yrs)

- All (100%, n=16) children aged 8-11yrs thought their **carers noticed how they were feeling***.



Adults you live with: Trust

- 100% of children (4-11yrs) **trusted the adults they lived with***.



Feeling safe in placement

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- Overall, 93% of children and young people (4-17yrs) reported **'always' feeling safe where they lived**; a higher proportion compared to children (82%) in the general population*.
- All (100%; n=12) of the youngest children (4-7yrs)* **'always' felt safe where they lived**.



Settled in placement (4-7yrs)

- All (100%, n=12) children aged 4-7yrs reported **feeling settled at home**.

*Denotes a Bright Spot of practice

What is working well? (2)



Social worker: Identity

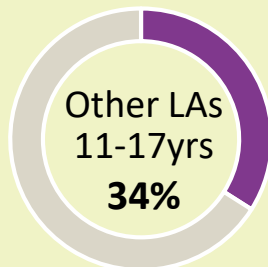
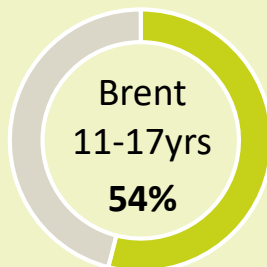
- Every child (100%, $n=16$) aged 8-11yrs **knew who their social worker was***.



Social worker: Continuity

- Young people (11-17yrs) in Brent were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to have **kept the same social worker in the previous 12 months***.

One social worker in previous 12 months



Social Worker: Trust

- The level of trust in social workers was high with 100% of the youngest children (4-7yrs) and 100% of children aged 8-11yrs **trusting their social worker***.



Understand reason for care

- In Brent, young people aged 11-17yrs were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to report having had a **full explanation for why they were in care (96% vs. 78%)***.



Trusted adult (8-11yrs)

- All (100%) children aged 8-11yrs reported **having a trusted adult in their lives***.

*Denotes a Bright Spot of practice

What is working well? (3)



Liking school

- 83% of the 11-17yrs group **liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit'** – a larger proportion than is reported by the general population (70%)*.



Access to nature (11-17yrs)

- 96% ($n=51$) of young people (11-17yrs) reported **having spent time outdoors** at least once in the previous week. The same is true for up to 85% of the general population*.



Appearance (11-17yrs)

- 87% of young people in Brent were **happy with how they looked**, compared to 86% in the general population*.



Positive about the future

- Compared to those in the general population, young people in Brent less often reported **low levels of positivity about their future** (12% vs. 9%)*.

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I feel that in future I will be successful because of college.
11-17yrs



Support for learning

- 91% ($n=64$) of children and young people aged 8-17yrs reported that **the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education**. The same is true for 88% of children in the general population*.

*Denotes a Bright Spot of practice

What could be improved?



Family time (8-11yrs)

- Just over a quarter (27%) of children (8-11yrs) felt **the time they spent with their Mum was 'just right'** compared to 47% of children looked after nationally*.



Friends

- The proportion (9%) of children and young people (4-17yrs) in Brent who **did not have a good friend** was higher compared with their peers (3%) in the general population.



Talking to your social worker (8-11yrs)

- A quarter (25%, $n=4$) of the young people aged 8-11yrs did not know that they **could ask to speak to their social worker on their own**; lower compared with children (15%) in other local authorities.



Settled in placement (8-11yrs)

- Only 56% of children aged 8-11 years reported **'always' feeling settled where they lived**. The same was true for 78% of children in other LAs.



Pets

- Compared to those in other LAs, children and young people in Brent less often **had a pet** (72% vs. 31% for children aged 8-11yrs* and 59% vs. 19% for young people aged 11-17yrs*).

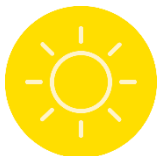


Things in life are worthwhile

- Young people (11-17yrs) in Brent were statistically less likely than those in other LAs to score very highly in terms of **feeling the things they did in life were worthwhile** (22% vs. 38%)*.

*Denotes a statistically significant difference

Well-being



All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) reported being happy the previous day*, as did 13 of the 16 (81%) children aged between 8-11yrs.

About a quarter (24%) of the young people (11-17yrs) appeared to be thriving, having scored very favourably in at least two of the four well-being measures. Overall:

- 26% reported being very positive about their future
- 22% reported a high sense of feeling that things done in life were worthwhile
- 22% reported very high levels of happiness the previous day and
- 26% reported very high levels of life satisfaction.



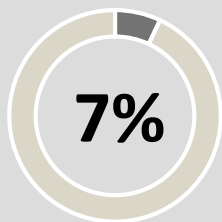
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Others appeared to be struggling:

- 9% reported low levels of positivity about their future
- 7% reported a low sense of feeling that things done in life were worthwhile
- 9% reported low levels of happiness the previous day and
- 9% reported low levels of life satisfaction.



Young people with low well-being



Young people (11-17yrs) with low overall well-being were statistically more likely to report:

- Feeling unhappy with how they looked
- Feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying
- Feeling they did not have a say in decisions that social workers made about their life

Brent changes over time (comparing 2020-21 with 2023-24)

bright spots

Six of the Bright Spots that were awarded in the 2020-21 survey were awarded again this year. These were: trusting your social worker, trusting the adults you live with, liking school, support for learning, feeling safe at home and happiness with appearance.

An impressive additional 12 Bright Spots have been awarded this year. These are:

- Happiness yesterday (4-7yrs)
- Liking your bedroom (4-7yrs)
- Feeling settled at home (4-7yrs)
- Having a trusted adult (8-11yrs)
- Knowing identity of social worker (8-11yrs)
- Sensitive parenting (8-11yrs)
- Placement continuity (11-17yrs)
- Social worker continuity (11-17yrs)
- Access to nature (11-17yrs)
- Reason for care explained (11-17yrs)
- Sharing confidences (11-17yrs)
- Positivity about the future (11-17yrs)

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KEY FINDINGS

Brent changes over time (cont'd)

(comparing 2020-21 with 2023-24)

Although not attracting a Bright Spot, the 2023-24 survey also showed other notable improvements since 2020-21:

4-7yrs:

- Knowing the identity of your social worker (73% → 83%)
- Having an explanation from an adult for why you are in care (18% → 42%)

8-11yrs:

- Feeling that life is getting better (72% → 94%)
- Not feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying (69% → 81%)
- Happiness yesterday (75% → 81%)

11-17yrs:

- Feeling that family time is 'just right': Mum (25% → 36%); Dad (13% → 19%); brothers and sisters (30% → 38%)
- Spending time outdoors in nature (86% → 96%)
- Having an explanation from an adult for why you are in care (72% → 96%)
- Feeling the adults you live with notice your feelings (83% → 91%)

Brent changes over time (cont'd)

(comparing 2020-21 with 2023-24)

However, less favourable findings were found in several domains, including:

4-7yrs:

- Having a really good friend (100% → 92%); Liking school (91% → 83%); Having fun at the weekends (100% → 91%)

8-11yrs:

- Feeling that family time is 'just right': Mum (46% → 27%); brothers and sisters (58% → 44%); Having a pet at home (41% → 31%); Trusting the adults you live with (96% → 88%); Feeling the adults you live with take an interest in what you do at school (100% → 88%); 'Always' feeling settled where you live (74% → 56%); Worrying about your feelings or behaviour (52% → 69%)

11-17yrs:

- Having a pet at home (31% → 19%); Feeling that life is getting better (88% → 74%); Getting chances to show you can be trusted (96% → 87%); Practising life skills (90% → 81%); Feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying (14% → 22%); Liking your bedroom (95% → 89%); Feeling happy yesterday – moderate-high (76% → 61%); Feeling satisfied with your life as a whole – moderate-high (74% → 62%); Feeling the things you do in life are worthwhile – moderate-high (79% → 61%).

Section 2:
Methodology

Methodology

- Three online surveys were used to capture looked after children and young people's views on their own well-being. The three versions were for:
 - a) children aged 4-7yrs (19 questions);
 - b) children aged 8-11yrs in primary school (35 questions); and
 - c) young people of secondary school age 11-17yrs (50 questions).
- There was a common set of 16 core questions.
- Paper surveys were also available and used in cases where no Internet was available, or when the young person preferred this method.
- In Brent at the time of the survey 258 children and young people aged 4-17yrs were looked after and able to complete the survey.
- Children and young people completed the survey anonymously: individual identifiers such as name, school etc. were not collected in order to allow responses without fear of consequences.
- If children recorded names or any identifying information on the survey these were removed by the researchers.

Methodology (2)

- Children and young people were first asked to complete the online survey in March and April 2023. As response rates stayed low, a decision was taken to close the survey and re-launch in October 2023. The survey stayed open until the end of March 2024.
- Surveys were generally completed with a trusted adult. Trusted adults presented the survey to children and young people, told them what it was about and gave them the support they needed to complete the survey.
- A range of colleagues from across the service were asked to act as trusted adults when meeting with children, including participation workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and teachers.
- Trusted adults were given guidance on how to support children and young people with the survey, including avoiding drawing attention to a child's care status by e.g. pulling them out of class as children had told us they found this embarrassing and upsetting.
- Team managers were asked to include the survey on regular team meeting agendas to report on and promote completion.
- Social care staff, including foster carers and social workers, were asked to encourage children and young people to complete the survey. However, foster carers and social workers did not support children and young people directly as there are questions about them in the survey.

Analysis

- Where possible, local authority (LA) data are compared to data on children and young people in the general population, and to the average responses from 42 local authorities who participated in Your Life, Your Care survey in 2015-20.
 - Data were weighted and tests run for significant difference between LAs. If something is statistically significant it means that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance.
- Brent previously ran the survey in 2020-21 so we have also highlighted how this year's findings compared to that survey.

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Section 3:

Survey results

3.1 Demographics

- + Sample size and response rate
- + Age and sex
- + Ethnicity
- + Placements
- + Number of years in care



Sample size and response rate

Whilst Bright Spots surveys achieve good engagement compared to other national surveys (for example, *The State of Nation: Children in Care 2015* survey, had a response rate of 3%), findings are from a proportion of your children/ young people so it is important to offer other ways to listen and respond to their views.

- 82 children and young people responded to the surveys from an eligible looked after population of 258.
- The overall response rate was 32%.

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Age range	Care population <i>n</i>	Responses <i>n</i>	Response rate %
4-7yrs	40	12	30%
8-11yrs	32	16	50%
11-17yrs	186	54	29%

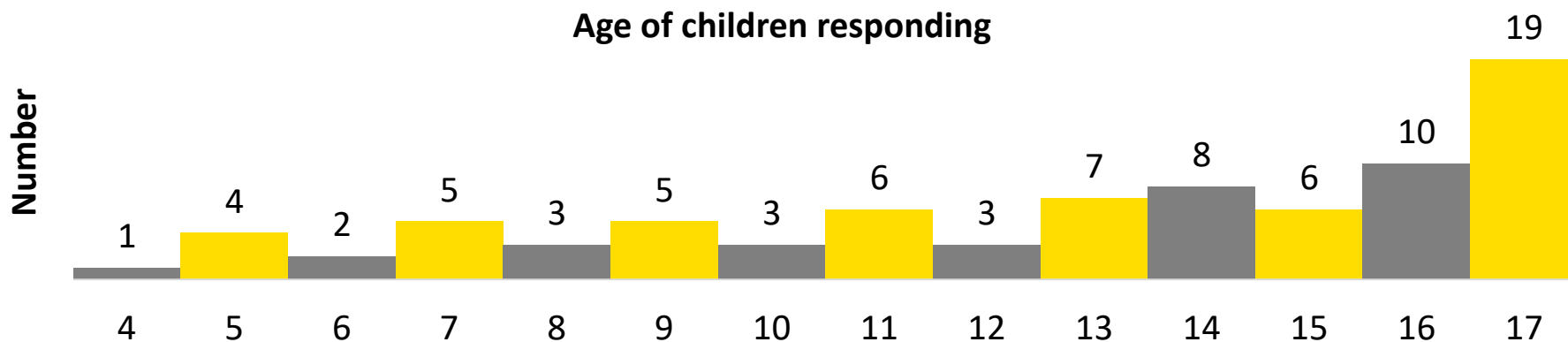
Age and sex

- In Brent, 62% of looked after children and young people were boys (DfE, 2022). This compares with 46% in our sample. Boys are therefore under-represented in this survey.

Age group	Girls <i>n</i>	Boys <i>n</i>	Let me tell you <i>n</i>	Total
4-7yrs	8	4	0	12 (15%)
8-11yrs*	8	7	0	15 (19%)
11-17yrs**	25	25	1	51 (66%)
TOTAL	41 (53%)	36 (46%)	1 (1%)	78 (100%)

*Don't want to say *n*=1

**Don't want to say *n*=3.

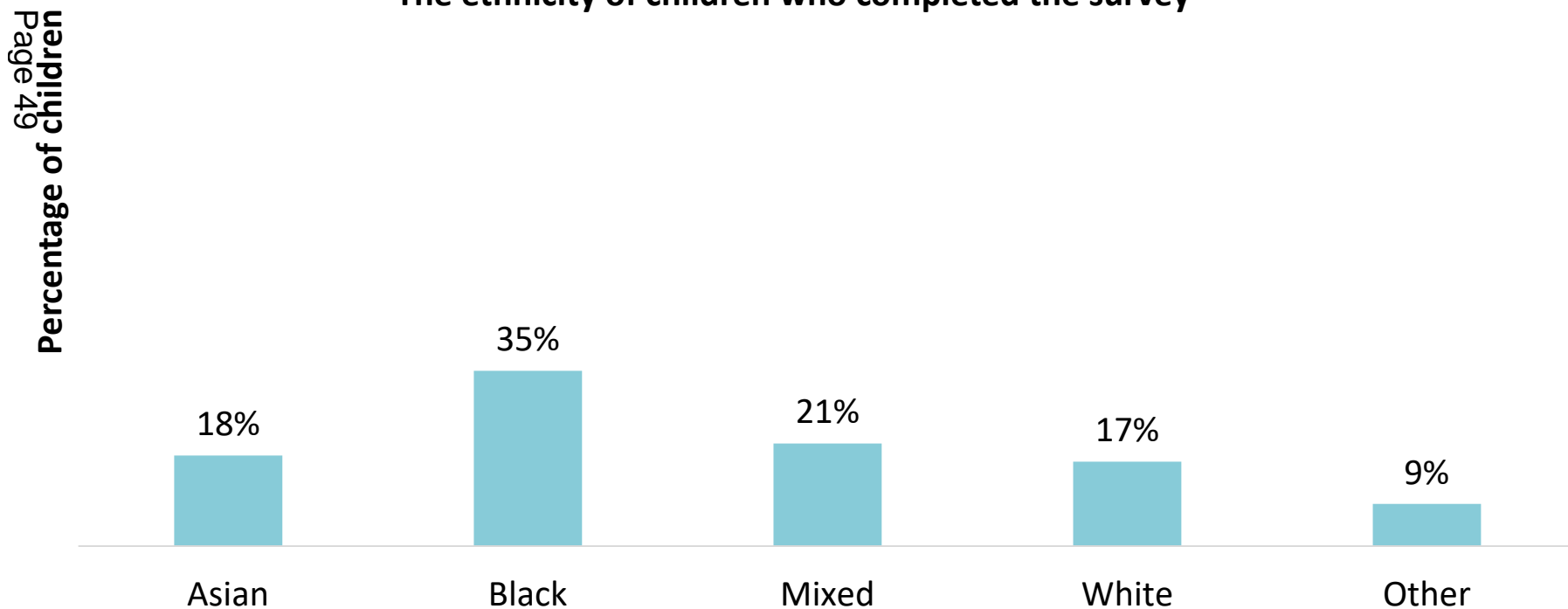


Ethnicity

Broadly, children of Asian, Black, Mixed and Other ethnicities appear proportionately represented in the survey. In Brent’s official DfE statistics, these ethnic groups represented 80% of their care population (DfE, 2022). In this survey, 84% of responses came from these groups.

- Just over one third (35%) of the children and young people who completed the survey were Black.
- One fifth (21%) were of Mixed ethnicity.

The ethnicity of children who completed the survey



Placement type

In Brent, 60% of looked after children were in foster care (DfE, 2022). Survey responses were fairly close in reflecting this proportion, with 65% in foster care. There was an over-representation of residential care: 7% in the survey sample compared to 2% in the published statistics (DfE, 2022).

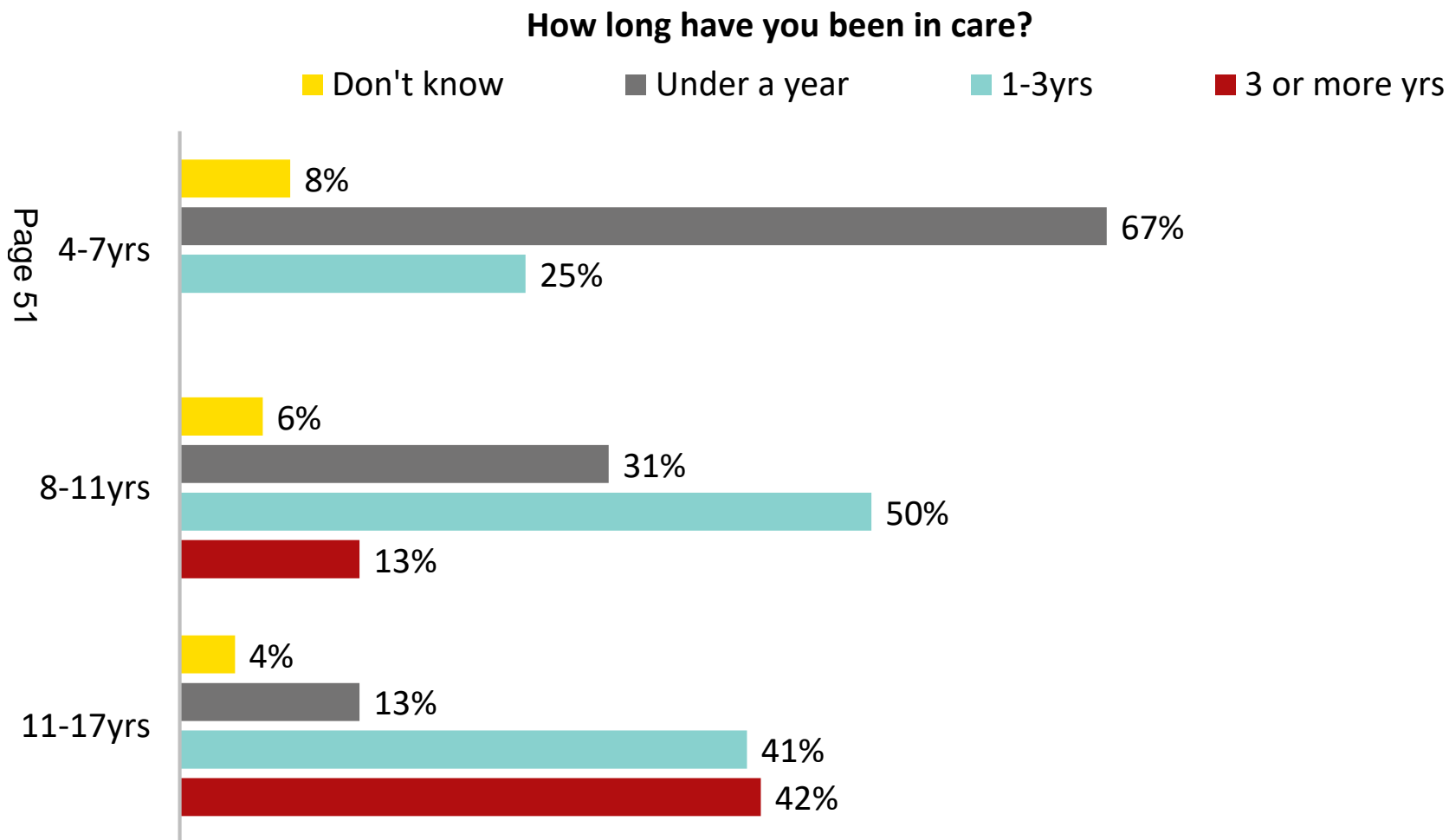
- Nearly two thirds (65%) of the children and young people were living in foster care. About one fifth (21%) were in family or friends care.
- Most commonly, 'somewhere else' was semi-independent accommodation.

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Age group	Foster care <i>n</i>	Family or friends care <i>n</i>	Residential care <i>n</i>	With parents <i>n</i>	Somewhere else <i>n</i>	Total
4-7yrs	10	1	1	0	0	12 (15%)
8-11yrs	13	2	1	0	0	16 (19%)
11-17yrs	30	14	4	1	5	54 (66%)
TOTAL	53 (65%)	17 (21%)	6 (7%)	1 (1%)	5 (6%)	82 (100%)

Number of years in care

- Most often ($n=33$, 41%) the children and young people (4-17yrs) had been in care for between 1-3 years.
- 24 (30%) had been in care 3 years or more.



3.2 Relationships

- + Family time
- + Good friends
- + Pets
- + Adults you live with: Continuity (11-17yrs)
- + Adults you live with: Trust
- + Social worker: Continuity (11-17yrs)
- + Social worker: Trust

Family time



The youngest children (4-7yrs) were not asked about family time, in case they found the questions upsetting.




Children and young people (8-17yrs) were asked if they *saw their Mum/ Dad/ brothers and sisters... 'too much', 'just the right amount', 'too little'*.

They were also given the answer options: *'I do not see her/ him/ them', 'Mum/ Dad has died', and 'I do not have brothers or sisters'*.

- Just over a quarter (27%) of children (8-11yrs) felt the time they spent with their Mum was 'just right' compared to 47% of children looked after nationally – a statistically significant difference.

- Three (19%) of the 16 children (8-11yrs) and as many as half (n=26; 49%) of the young people (11-17yrs) had no contact with either parent.
- More than half (53%) of children (8-11yrs) felt they saw their Mum 'too little', and about a quarter (n=4; 27%) felt they saw their Dad 'too little'.
- The proportion of children (8-11yrs) who felt the time they spent with their brothers and sisters was 'just right' had decreased notably since last time the survey was run, from 58% in 2020-21 to 44% in the current survey.
- Just over a third (36%) of 11-17yr olds felt that how often they saw their Mum was 'just right'. About one in five (19%) felt that way about contact with their Dad – a lower proportion compared to young people (26%) in other LAs; however, the difference did not reach statistical significance.
- 38% of young people (11-17yrs) felt the amount of contact they had with their siblings was 'just right'. This was lower compared to the young people (49%) in other LAs; however, the difference did not reach statistical significance.

Family time (2)

Family member	Age group	Too much	Just right	Too little	I do not see them
	8-11yrs n=16	0 (0%)	4 (27%)	8 (53%)	3 (20%)
	11-17yrs n=53*	3 (6%)	17 (36%)	5 (11%)	22 (47%)
	8-11yrs n=16	0 (0%)	5 (33%)	4 (27%)	6 (40%)
	11-17yrs n=53*	1 (2%)	8 (19%)	4 (10%)	29 (69%)
	8-11yrs n=16	1 (6%)	7 (44%)	6 (38%)	2 (12%)
	11-17yrs n=53*	9 (19%)	18 (38%)	3 (7%)	17 (36%)

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* Missing n=1

Parent died	Don't have any siblings
1	-----
6	-----
1	-----
11	-----
-----	0
-----	6

Family time: 8-11yrs (comments)

Children and young people were also asked, *Is there anything you want to say about how much you see your family and important people in your life?*

- 10 children answered this question.
- 6 wanted to see more of family members (usually mothers) or wanted to know when they would be able to live with them again.
- One child simply reported missing their family, another appreciated living with siblings.
- Two children described their current family contact arrangements.

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It is pretty good and I like living with my brothers.

I miss them a lot.

I never see my birth Mum, I see my birth Dad sometimes.

I'd like to see them more often.

I want to see my mum a little bit more.

I would like to know when I am going to go home to my mum.

I would like to go back to my family some day.

I don't want to see my dad anymore. I want to go back to living with my mum.

Family time: 11-17yrs (comments)

Children and young people were also asked, *Is there anything you want to say about how much you see your family and important people in your life?*

- 22 young people answered this question.
- 5 wanted to see more of family members.
 - 4 explained that they could not see their family as they did not live in the UK.
 - Some described their contact arrangements, including who they did (and did not) see. Others wrote about how often they saw their family or how they felt about contact time.

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I would like to see my family more.

I chose not to speak to my family.

I have not seen them for three years; they are living in [other country].

I see them too little and miss being with them.

I see them enough on a weekly basis.

I only see my siblings. I don't see my parents.

I see my family members whenever I want to.

Am happy with the way it is.

Sometimes I visit my uncle.

I very rarely see my dad, and I message my mum every time something important happens like Christmas.

Good friends



Not having friends is associated with loneliness and anxiety. All children and young people were asked, *Do you have a really good friend?*

General population: *The Good Childhood Report* (2020) of young people aged 10-15yrs found that 3% of young people did not have a good friend.

- Overall, most (91%) of the children and young people reported having at least one good friend, but 7 (9%) did not.
- The proportion of children and young people in Brent without a friend was higher compared with their peers (3%) in the general population.

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Age group	Yes, I have a really good friend <i>n</i> (%)	No, I don't have a really good friend <i>n</i> (%)
4-7yrs	11 (92%)	1 (8%)
8-11yrs	15 (94%)	1 (6%)
11-17yrs	49 (91%)	5 (9%)
TOTAL	75 (91%)	7 (9%)

Pets



Pets were important to children in all the focus groups we ran.

Children and young people said that pets are non-judgmental – they love you no matter what and are always pleased to see you. They can also give children an opportunity to take responsibility.

Children and young people aged between 8-17yrs were asked, *Do you have a pet in the home you live in now?*

72% of families in the UK with children aged up to 7yrs owned a pet (Westgarth et al. 2010)

- 5 (31%) of the 8-11yrs children lived in a household with a pet.
- In the older (11-17yrs group), just 10 (19%) of young people had a pet where they lived.
- Compared to those in other LAs, children and young people in Brent less often had a pet (72% vs. 31% for children aged 8-11yrs and 59% vs. 19% for young people aged 11-17yrs).

Adults you live with: Continuity

Placement moves



Young people (11-17yrs) were asked: *How many placements have you had?*

- Over half (55%, $n=29$) of the young people (11-17yrs) had remained in the same placement since entering care. None reported having been in more than 7 placements.

- In Brent, young people (11-17yrs) were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to have remained in the same placement since entering care (55% vs. 34%). **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Number of placements	No.*	%
1 placement	29	55%
2-4 placements	19	36%
5-7 placements	4	7%
8-10 placements	0	0%
11+	0	0%
Don't know	1	2%

* Missing $n=1$

Adults you live with: Trust

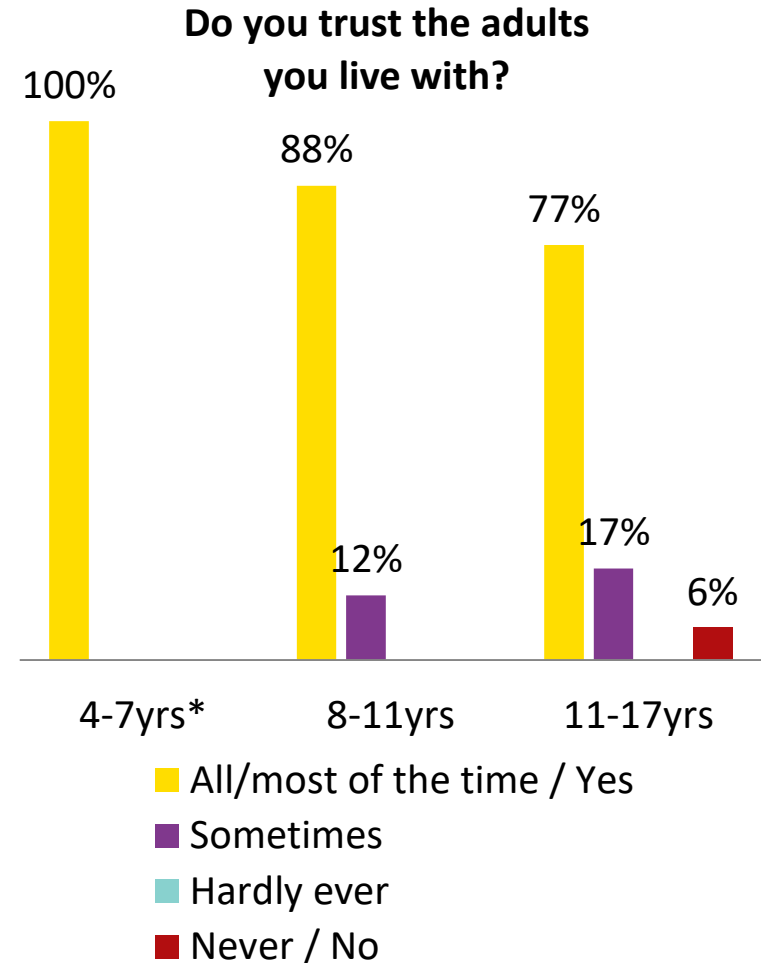


Children and young people were asked, *Do you trust the adults you live with?*

- 100% of the youngest children (4-7yrs) and 100% of children (8-11yrs) trusted the adults they lived with. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

94% of young people (11-17yrs) trusted the adults they lived with.

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* 4-7 year olds had 'yes' and 'no' as answer options whereas the older age groups could indicate whether they 'all or most of the time', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' trusted the adults they lived with.

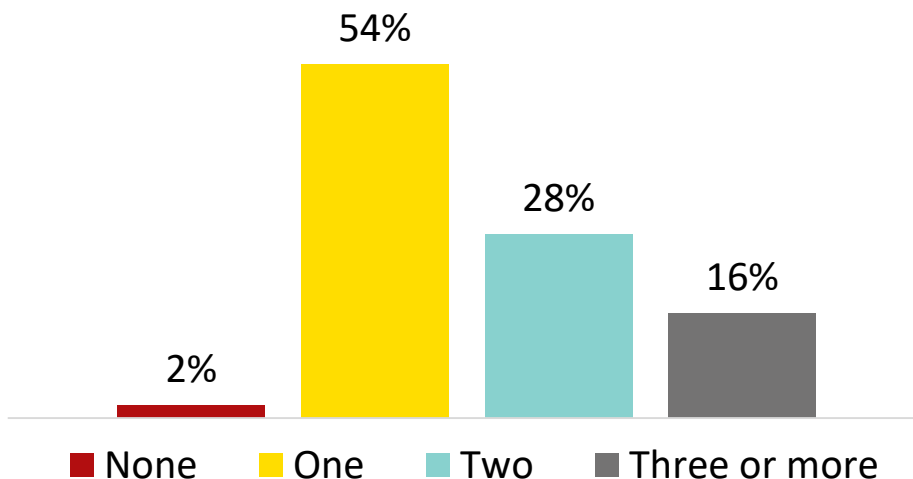
Social worker: Continuity (11-17yrs)



11-17 year olds were asked: *How many social workers have you had in the last 12 months (since this time last year)?*

How many social workers have you had in the last 12 months?

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- About one in six (16%) young people reported having had at least three social workers in the previous 12 months.
- In Brent, young people (11-17yrs) were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to have kept the same social worker in the previous 12 months (54% vs. 34%). **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Social worker: Trust

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Children & young people (n=76) who knew who their social worker was were asked, *Do you trust the social worker you have now?*

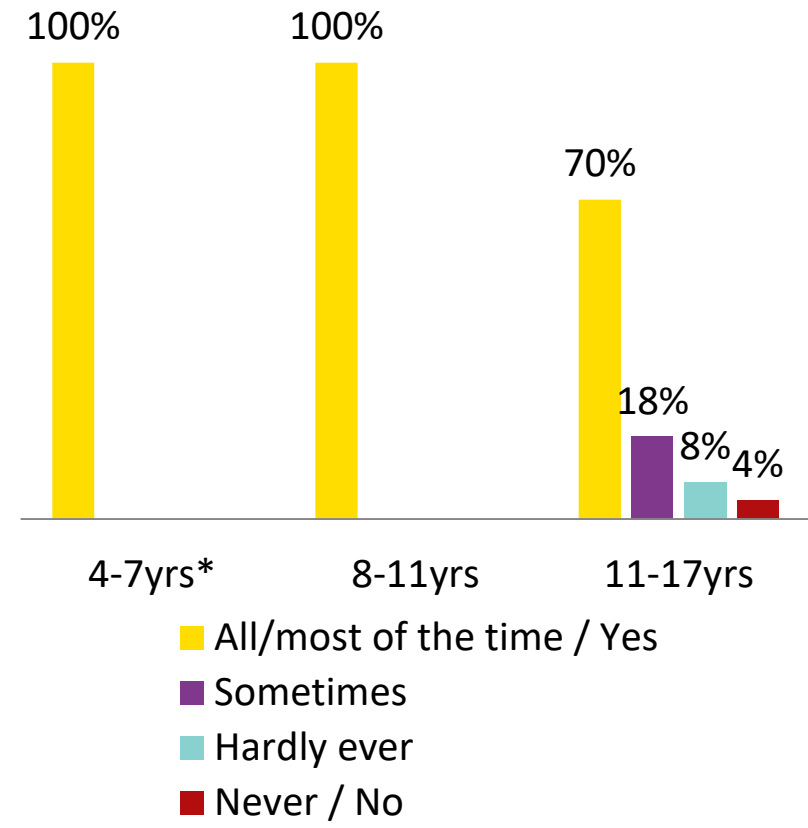
- The level of trust in social workers was high with 100% of the youngest children (4-7yrs) and 100% of children aged 8-11yrs trusting their social worker. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**
- 88% of young people (11-17yrs) trusted their social worker.

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Being in care has not been easy but my social worker does her best for me.
11-17yrs

Nationally, 94% of 4-7yrs; 95% of 8-11yrs and 87% of 11-17yrs trust their social worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' (Selwyn et al., 2021).

Do you trust your social worker?











* 4-7 year olds had 'yes' and 'no' as answer options whereas the older age groups could indicate whether they 'all or most of the time', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' trusted their social worker.

Changes since last survey

Better than last survey

Similar percentage

Worse than last survey

		4-7yrs		8-11yrs		11-17yrs	
		2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24
	Contact with mum just right	-	-	46%	27%	25%	36%
	Contact with dad just right	-	-	31%	33%	13%	19%
 Page 63	Contact with siblings just right	-	-	58%	44%	30%	38%
	Have a good friend	100%	92%	96%	94%	93%	91%
	Have a pet	-	-	41%	31%	31%	19%
	Trust the adults they live with	100%	100%	96%	88%	95%	94%
	Trust social worker	100%	100%	96%	100%	89%	88%
	1 social worker in last 12 months	-	-	-	-	40%	54%

3.3 Resilience

- + Life is getting better
- + Trusted adult
- + Being trusted & helping out
- + Liking school/ college
- + Adults you live with: Support for learning
- + Having fun & hobbies
- + Access to nature
- + Life skills
- + Internet access where you live

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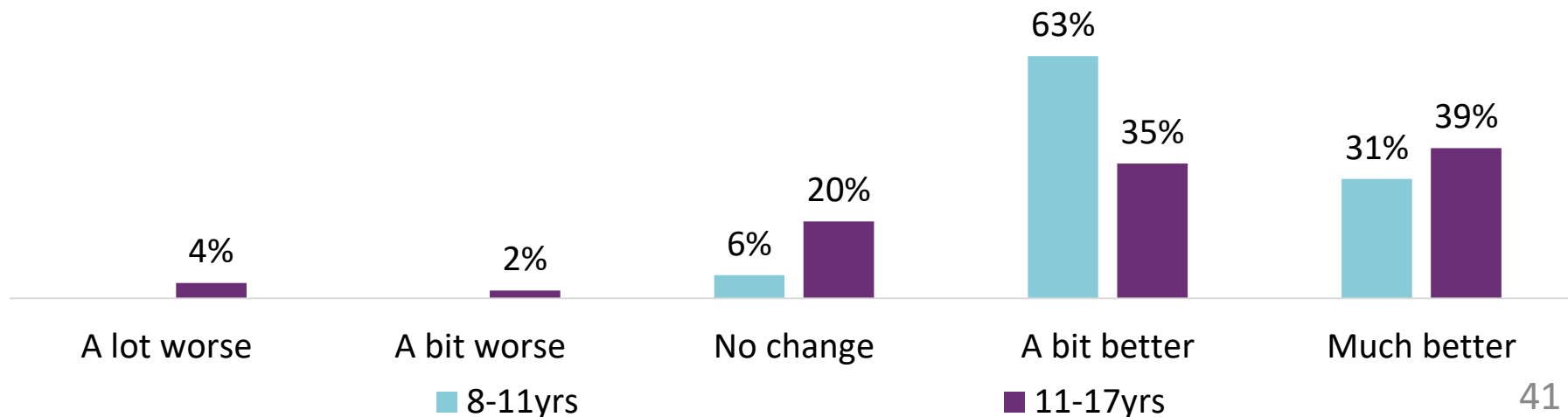
Life is getting better

Children aged 8-17yrs were asked, *Is your life getting better?* and could choose from a five point scale ranging from *'A lot worse'* to *'Much better'*.

- 94% ($n=15$) of children aged 8-11 years and three quarters (74%, $n=40$) of young people aged 11-17 years felt that their lives were getting better.
- The proportion of children and young people in Brent who felt their lives were getting better differed from the national average with 8-11yrs doing better (94% vs. 85%) and 11-17yrs doing worse (74% vs. 83%) than their peers in other LAs.

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Is your life getting better?



Trusted adult

Children and young people aged between 8-17yrs were asked: *Do you have an adult who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?*

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Having one key adult has been shown to be the turning point in many looked after young people's lives (Gilligan, 2009).

Having a trusted adult has been shown to be the main factor in helping children recover from traumatic events.

- All 16 (100%) children (8-11yrs) reported having a trusted adult in their lives. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**
- 47 (87%) of the young people aged 11-17yrs reported having a trusted adult in their lives. Seven (13%) young people had no such person.

Being trusted & helping out

Children (8-11yrs) were asked, *How often do you get the chance to help the teacher?*

Children had said in the focus groups that they were never trusted to show visitors around school or deliver a message because they were looked after.

- Five (31%) children (8-11yrs) responded that 'all or most of the time' they were asked to help and nine (56%) answered 'sometimes'.
- Two children (13%) wrote 'hardly ever'.



We asked young people: *How often do you get the chance to show you can be trusted?*

Having trusting relationships and being trusted were key issues raised by the children in the focus groups underpinning the development of this survey.

- 64% of young people (11-17yrs) thought they were given opportunities 'all or most of the time' to show they could be trusted and 23% given them 'sometimes'.
- 11% responded 'hardly ever' and 2% 'never'.

Liking school/ college



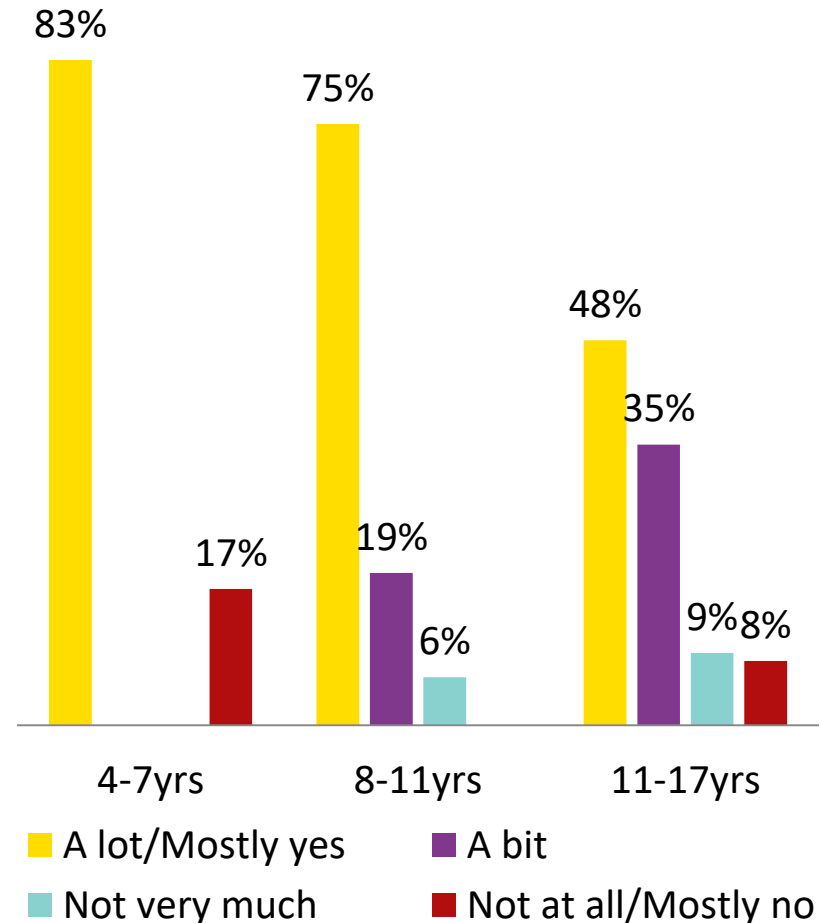
Children and young people aged 8-17yrs were asked, *How much do you like school/ college?* Children aged 4-7yrs were asked, *Do you like school?*

General population: Liking school

The *Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children Survey* (2020) of 3,398 young people (11-15yrs) reported that 70% liked school 'a lot' or 'a bit' and 30% 'not very much' or 'not at all'. Liking school decreased with the child's age and girls were more likely to say they enjoyed school 'a lot' in comparison with boys.

- 89% of children aged 4-11yrs liked school.
- 83% of the 11-17yrs group liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit' – a larger proportion than reported by the general population (70%). **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Do you like school/ college?



Adults you live with: Support for learning



Children aged 8-17yrs were asked, *Do the adults you live with show an interest in what you are doing at school/ college?*

- 88% ($n=14$) of 8-11yrs and 93% ($n=50$) of 11-17yrs reported that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education ('all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'). The same is true for 88% of children in the general population: support for learning is therefore a **Bright Spot of practice**.
- 2 (4%) of young people aged 11-17yrs reported not being at school or college.

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General population: Support for learning

The Health Behaviour of School-aged Children survey (2020) reported that 88% of children in England said their parents were interested in what happens to them at school.

Want free education to make me feel better as I am not in college. I think this will help me.

11-17yrs

Having fun & hobbies

Children aged 4-11yrs were asked, *At the weekends, do you get to have fun?*



The 11-17yrs survey asked young people, *Outside of school or college, do you get the chance to spend time on your own hobbies or activities?*

- The majority (88%) of children and young people had fun or took part in hobbies or activities outside of school at least sometimes.
- The proportion of young people (85%) who took part in hobbies or activities outside of school was lower compared with the average for young people (91%) in care in other local authorities; however, the difference was not statistically significant.

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Age group	Yes, I have fun/ take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>	Sometimes I have fun/ take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>	No, I don't have fun or take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs*	10 (91%)	-	1 (9%)
8-11yrs	8 (50%)	7 (44%)	1 (6%)
11-17yrs	19 (35%)	27 (50%)	8 (15%)
TOTAL	37 (46%)	34 (42%)	10 (12%)

* Missing *n*=1

Access to nature



Contact with nature can reduce stress and improve mental health (Play England, 2012). Some of the children in our focus groups said safeguarding fears limited their opportunities.

We asked children and young people (8-17yrs), *In the past week, how often have you spent time outdoors (e.g. going to the park, fields, woods or beach)?* Answer options were *'every day'*, *'more than once this week'*, *'once this week'* and *'not at all'*.

General population:

81%-85% of children in England spent time outside in nature at least once per week (The People and Nature Survey for England, 2021).

- 96% ($n=51$) of young people (11-17yrs) reported having spent time outdoors at least once in the week they completed the survey. The same is true for up to 85% of the general population. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**
- 75% ($n=12$) of children (8-11yrs) reported having spent time outdoors at least once in the week they completed the survey. This compares with up to 85% of young children in the general population who did so.

Life skills

We asked the young people in the 11-17yrs group, *How often do you get to practise life skills like cooking healthy food, washing clothes or using money?*



This question was asked as many young people in the focus groups thought that they didn't feel prepared for living independently.

- 81% (n=44) of the young people reported having been taught independence skills (at least sometimes).
- 10 young people (19%) reported this to 'hardly ever' be the case.
- The proportion of young people in Brent who had opportunities to practise life skills had decreased since last time the survey was run (90% in 2020-21 vs. 81% in this survey). The proportion was also lower compared with young people (89%) in care in other local authorities; however, the difference did not reach statistical significance.

[What would you change to make being in care better for you?]

More opportunities to achieve more life skills.

11-17yrs

Internet access where you live (11-17yrs)



Young people 11-17yrs were asked, *Can you connect to the Internet where you are living now?*

General population: Access to the Internet

- In the UK, 100% of households with children have an Internet connection (ONS, 2020).

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The *Millennium Cohort Study* of children aged 11yrs old found that children who never used the Internet outside school had a high probability of low well-being (The Children's Society, 2014).










- The vast majority (96%) of young people reported that they had access to the Internet where they lived.
- 2 (4%) young people did not have internet access.

Changes since last survey

Better than last survey

Similar percentage

Worse than last survey

		4-7yrs		8-11yrs		11-17yrs	
		2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24
	Life is getting better	-	-	72%	94%	88%	74%
	Have a trusted adult	-	-	96%	100%	91%	87%
	Asked to help at school/ chance to be trusted	-	-	85%	87%	96%	87%
	Like school	91%	83%	92%	94%	88%	83%
	Adults interested in education	-	-	100%	88%	95%	93%
	Have fun/ do hobbies & activities	100%	91%	96%	94%	87%	85%
	Access to nature	-	-	74%	75%	86%	96%
	Practise life skills	-	-	-	-	90%	81%
	Internet access at home	-	-	-	-	95%	96%

3.4 Rights

+ Having a say in decision-making

+ Stigma of being in care

+ Feeling safe in placement

+ Bullying

+ Knowing identity of social workers

+ Contact with social workers

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Having a say in decision-making



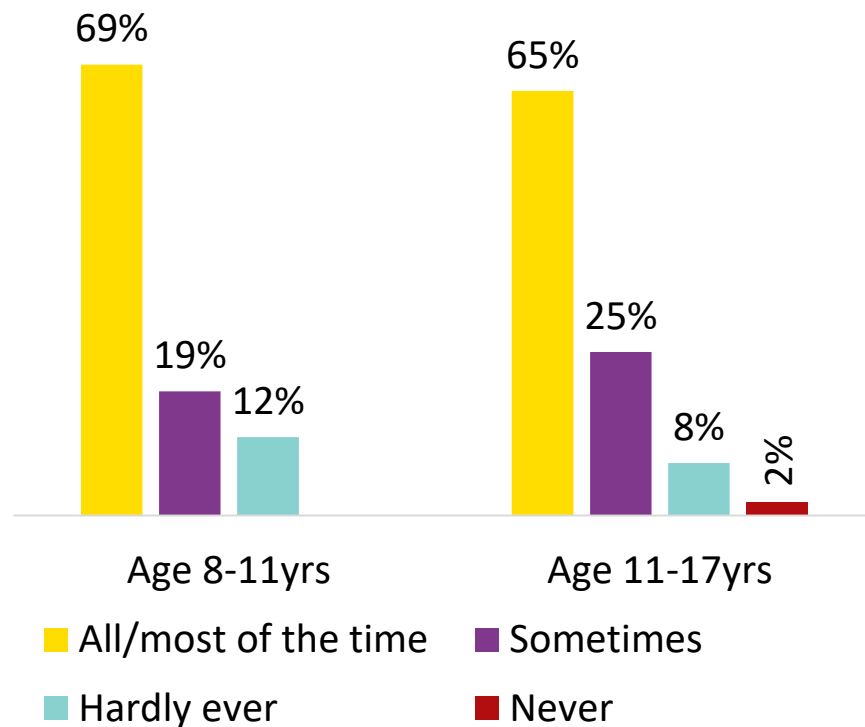
Children aged 8-17yrs were asked,
Do you have a say in the decisions that social workers make about your life?

Do you have a say in the decisions that social workers make about your life?

- 88% of 8-11 year-olds and 90% of 11-17 year olds felt they had a say in decisions made about their life at least 'sometimes'.

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I like being able to have a say in decisions about me.
11-17yrs



Stigma of being in care



The 11-17yrs age group were asked a question in the survey about feeling different:

Do adults do things that make you feel embarrassed about being in care?

Younger children were not asked these questions, as the focus groups suggested that being made to feel different was of much greater concern in adolescence.

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Having to constantly ask for you subsistence allowance. Having to ask for help with my driver's licence. Having your shoulder dislocated by the police. SW putting an unstable young person with me.

My teachers talk about my circumstance with no tact.

Not enough privacy.

Because all my friends are living with their family and I am living with foster carer.

- Four (8%) of the young people reported that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care.
- These young people all made further comments about what adults did to make them feel embarrassed.

Feeling safe in placement



All children were asked, *Do you feel safe in the home you live in now?* It is difficult to know what children were thinking about when answering, but feeling secure is about how the world *feels*, not necessarily how it is.

- Overall, 93% of children and young people (4-17yrs) reported feeling safe in their placements.
- One (6%) child in the 8-11yrs group and 5 (9%) in the 11-17yrs group ticked the 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' boxes.

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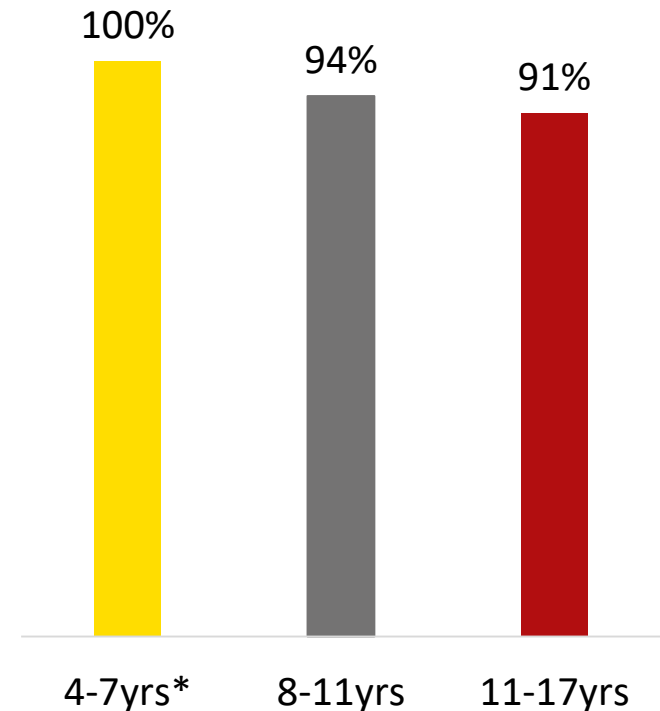
The proportion of children and young people (93%) aged 8-17yrs who 'always' felt safe at home was higher compared with children (82%) in the general population.

- 100% of children aged 4-7yrs reported feeling safe at home. **These are Bright Spots of practice.**

General population:

The Children's Worlds survey found that 82% of children (10-11yrs) in the general population felt 'totally' safe at home (Rees *et al.*, 2020). Not feeling safe is associated with raised cortisol levels and difficulty in learning and concentration (Harvard University, 2012).

I always feel safe in the home I live in



* Percentage of 4-7year olds answering 'Yes, always' (4-7 year olds had 'yes, always' and 'no, not always' as response options whereas the older age groups could indicate whether they 'always', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' felt safe).

Bullying



We asked, *Do you ever feel afraid of going to school because of bullying?* (For example being hit or called mean names, or nasty stories being spread about you.) and if yes, *Do you get help from an adult?*

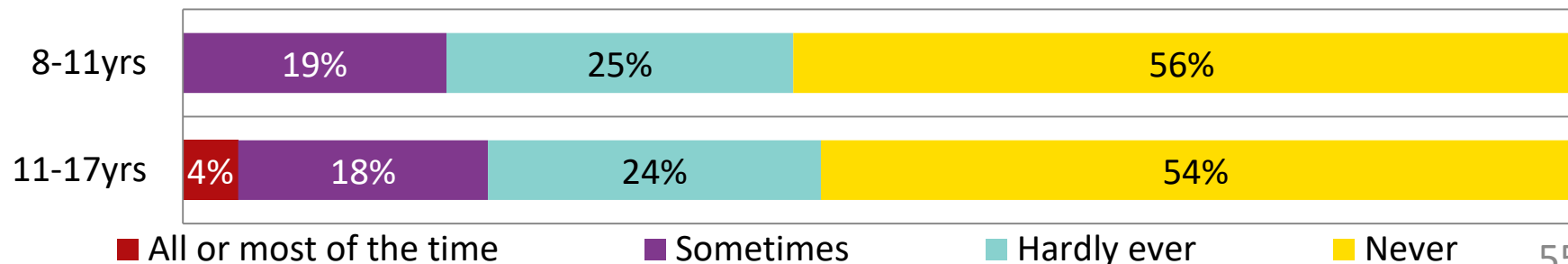
General population: Bullying

- Analysis of the *Children's Worlds* surveys in 22 countries has shown that being free from bullying is one of the most important factors in children's well-being (Rees *et al.*, 2010).
- About a third (36%) of children aged 11-15yrs in England say they have been bullied at school in the past couple of months (HBSC, 2020).

- Three children (19%) aged 8-11yrs reported being 'sometimes' afraid to go to school because of bullying. This was a lower percentage compared with children (29%) in care in other local authorities, but the difference did not reach statistical significance. All three felt they were getting help from an adult to cope with bullying.
- 22% (n=12) young people 11-17yrs reported being afraid to go to school because of bullying 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. Ten of these 12 young people confirmed that they felt they were getting help from an adult for this.

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Do you ever feel afraid of going to school or college because of bullying?



Knowing identity of social workers



All the children and young people were asked, *Do you know who your social worker is now?*

- Overall, 7% ($n=6$) of children and young people did not know who their social worker was.
- However, every child (100%, $n=16$) aged 8-11yrs did know the identity of their social worker. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

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Age group	Know who social worker is n (%)	Don't know who social worker is n (%)
4-7yrs	10 (83%)	2 (17%)
8-11yrs	16 (100%)	0 (0%)
11-17yrs	50 (93%)	4 (7%)
TOTAL	76 (93%)	6 (7%)

Contact with social workers



Young people aged 11-17yrs ($n=50$) who knew who their social worker was were asked, *Is it easy to get in touch with your social worker?*



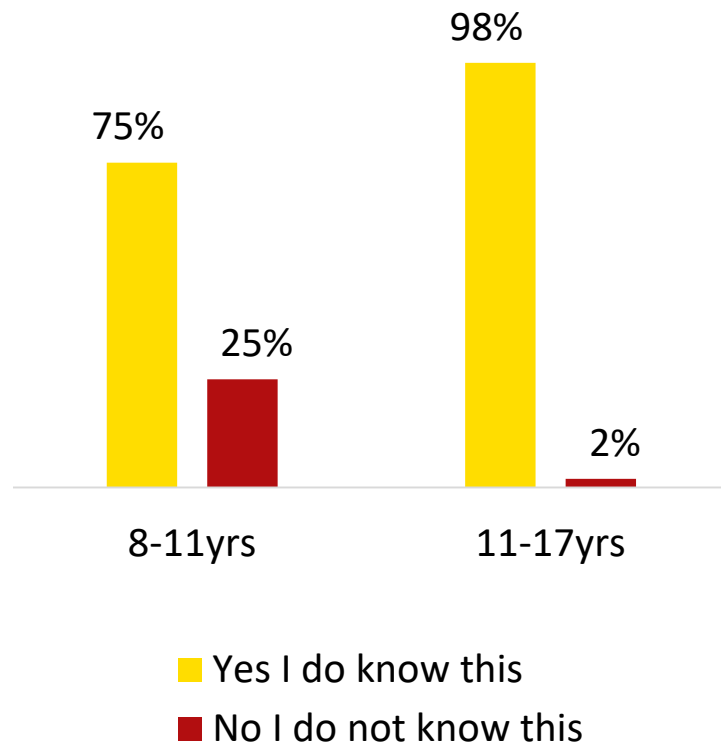
Children and young people (8-17yrs) were also asked, *Do you know that you can ask to speak to your social worker on your own?*

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A high proportion (92%) of young people (11-17yrs) reported being able to easily get in touch with their social worker ('all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'). Four young people (8%) reported not being able to do so.

- A quarter (25%, $n=4$) of the children aged 8-11yrs did not know that they could ask to speak to a social worker on their own; a significantly higher proportion compared with children (15%) in care in other local authorities.

Do you know you can ask to speak to your social worker on your own?










Changes since last survey

Better than last survey

No significant change

Worse than last survey

		4-7yrs		8-11yrs		11-17yrs	
		2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24
	Have a say in decision-making	-	-	84%	88%	91%	90%
	Embarrassed by adults for being in care	-	-	-	-	4%	8%
	Always feel safe where they live	100%%	100%	88%	94%	93%	91%
	Afraid to go to school because of bullying	-	-	31%	19%	14%	22%
	Know who their social worker is	73%	83%	96%	100%	96%	93%
	Easy to contact social worker	-	-	-	-	92%	92%
	Know they can speak to social worker alone	-	-	80%	75%	100%	98%

3.5 Recovery

- + Knowing reason for being in care
- + Feeling settled in placement
- + Liking bedrooms
- + Adults you live with: Sensitive parenting
- + Adults you live with: Sharing confidences (11-17yrs)
- + Help with worries
- + Parity with peers (11-17yrs)
- + Happiness with appearance (11-17yrs)

Knowing reason for being in care

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Having a coherent account of one's history and understanding the reasons that led to becoming looked after are important in the development of an integrated identity and in recovery from abuse and neglect (Adshead, 2012; Adler, 2012).

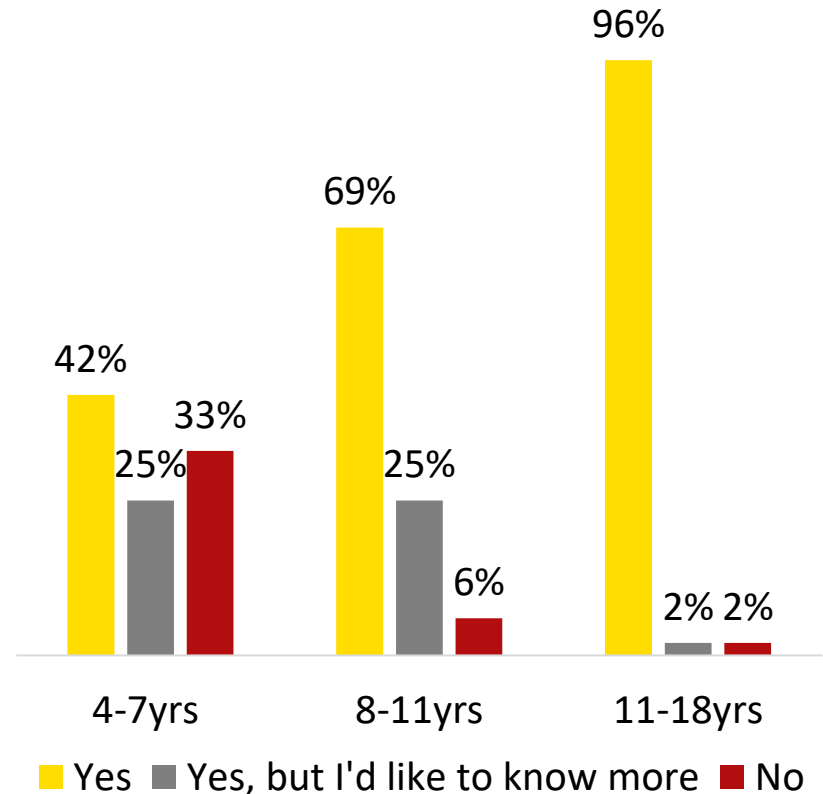
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All the children and young people were asked, *Has an adult explained why you are in care?*

- In Brent, young people aged 11-17 years were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to report having had a good enough explanation as to why they were in care (96% vs. 78%). **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Has an adult explained why you are in care?



Feeling settled in placement

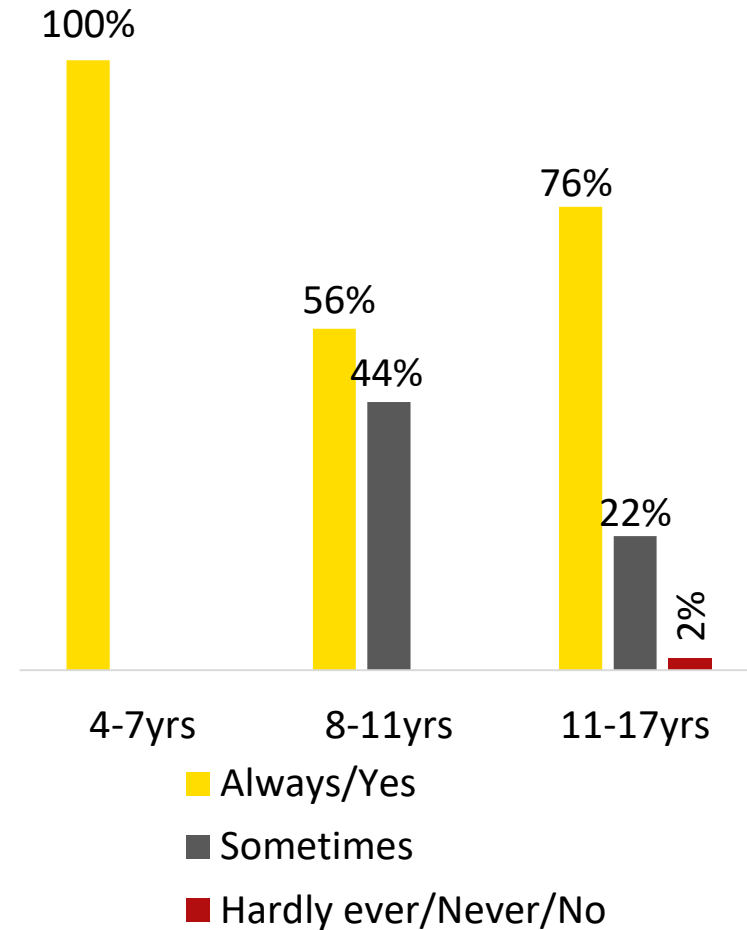


We wanted to know if children felt a sense of belonging and felt at ease in their placements. Based on advice from our focus groups, children and young people were asked:

Do you feel settled in the home you live in now? (Do you feel comfortable, accepted and at ease?) The youngest children (4-7yrs) could answer 'yes' or 'no'. Children and young people (8-17yrs) could answer: 'always', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever', or 'never'.

- Every (100%) child aged 4-7 years reported feeling settled in the home they lived in. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**
- Notably only 56% of children aged 8-11 years reported 'always' feeling settled where they lived. The same was true for 78% of children in other LAs – a large difference, but did not reach statistical significance.

Feeling settled



Liking bedrooms



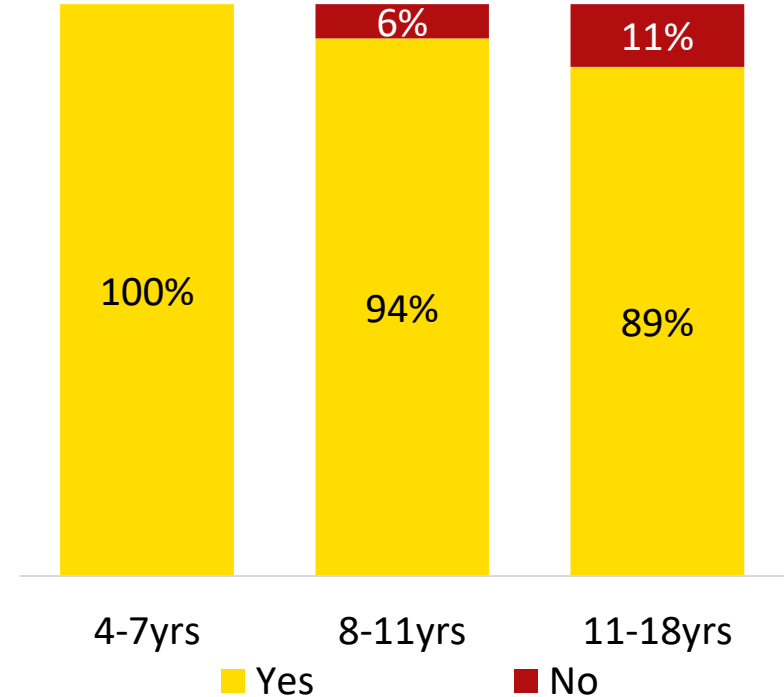
Liking your bedroom was an important feature for the focus groups we ran.

Young people reflected that their bedrooms were a place for being on your own in busy homes. It is linked to safety, sense of identity and feeling a sense of belonging.

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- The majority of children and young people (4-17yrs) liked their bedrooms, including all (100%) of the very youngest children (4-7yrs). **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Do you like your bedroom?



Adults you live with: Sensitive parenting



All children were asked, *Do the adults you live with notice how you are feeling?*

- 92%, (n=11) of children (4-7yrs) and 91% (n=49) of young people (11-17yrs) thought their carers noticed how they were feeling (at least 'sometimes').
- All (100%, n=16) children aged 8-11yrs thought their carers noticed how they were feeling. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Adults you live with: Sharing confidences (11-17yrs)

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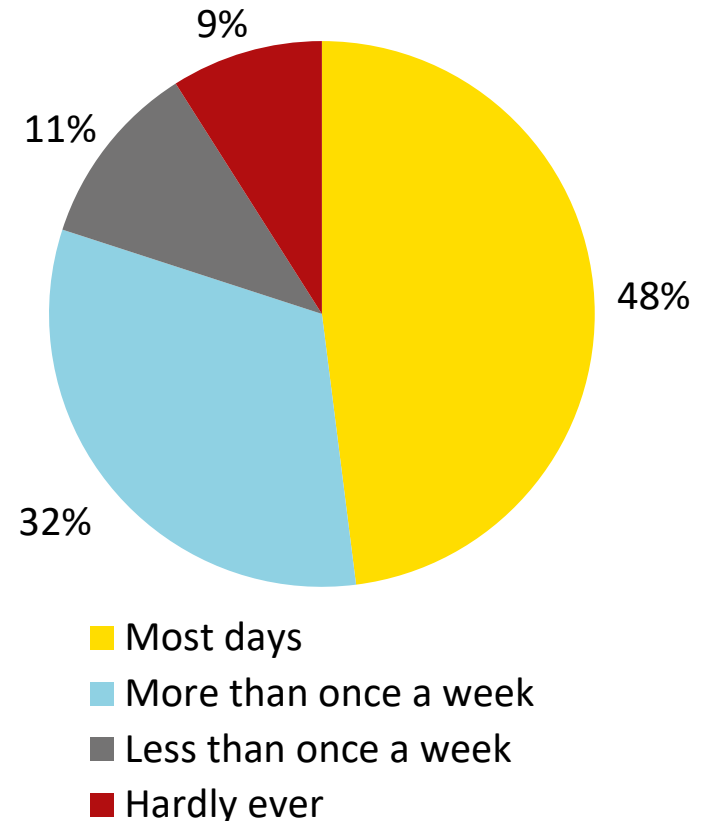
Young people (11-17yrs) were asked, *How often do you talk to the adults you live with about things that matter to you?*

General population

The *Understanding Society* survey (2017) found that 66% of children (10-15yrs) talked regularly to a parent.

- 80% of young people talked regularly (more than once a week) with their carers/ parents about things that mattered to them. In the general population, 66% of children talked regularly to a parent. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Speaking to adults about things that matter to you



Support with worries



Children and young people (8-11yrs and 11-17yrs) were asked,

Do you ever worry about your feelings or behaviour? and, if they did worry, *Are you getting help from an adult?*



General population & other comparative data: Mental health

- In England, 39% of looked after children aged 5-16yrs have concerning SDQ scores (DfE, 2019).
Studies of looked after populations show that children's level of difficulties are much higher, ranging from about 45% of children in foster care to 75% of those in residential (Ford *et al.*, 2007).
- In the general population, 13.5% of children have SDQ scores that suggest they have a clinical level of mental health difficulties (ONS, 2016b).

- Three (19%) children (8-11yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' about their feelings and behaviour, whilst eight (50%) worried 'sometimes'. The proportion (69%) of children in Brent who worried about their feelings or behaviour was higher compared with children (58%) in other local authorities; however, the difference didn't reach statistical significance.
- Ten (91%) of the eleven children who worried reported getting help from an adult to cope with their worries.
- 13% of young people (11-17yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' whilst 46% worried 'sometimes'.
- 78% (n=25) of the 32 young people who worried reported getting help about this from an adult.

Parity with peers (11-17yrs)



Young people (11-17yrs) were asked, *Outside of school or college, do you get the chance to do similar things to your friends?*

- 87% (n=46) of the young people reported that they did similar things to their friends at least 'sometimes'.
- 13% (n=7) of young people reported 'hardly ever' or 'never' doing similar things to their friends.

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I have to always come home early and this makes feel sad, because I get bored at home and want to spend time with my friends.

11-17yrs

Happiness with appearance (11-17yrs)



Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm (Cash and Smolek, 2011).

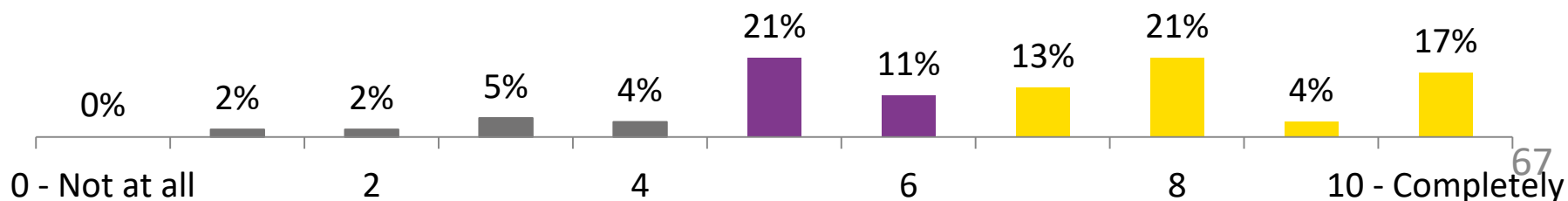
General population:

14% of 10-17 year olds in the general population are unhappy with their appearance. Girls are more likely to have a lower opinion of their appearance than boys (Good Childhood Report, 2020).

- The majority (87%) of young people were at least moderately happy with how they looked.
- In Brent, proportionately more girls reported feeling unhappy with the way they looked, but findings were not statistically significant.

- 13% of the young people in Brent were unhappy with their appearance, compared to 14% in the general population. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

How happy are you with the way you look?












Changes since last survey

Better than last survey

Similar percentage

Worse than last survey

		4-7yrs		8-11yrs		11-17yrs	
		2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24	2020-21	2023-24
	Reason for care fully explained	18%	42%	70%	69%	72%	96%
	Feel settled where they live	73%	100%	74%	56%	75%	76%
	Like their bedrooms	91%	100%	85%	84%	95%	89%
	Adults they live with notice feelings	91%	92%	100%	100%	83%	91%
	Talk to adults about things that matter	-	-	-	-	60%	80%
	Worry about feelings/behaviour	-	-	52%	69%	46%	59%
	Get help with worries	-	-	86%	91%	77%	78%
	Same opportunities as friends	-	-	-	-	82%	87%
	High/very high happiness with appearance	-	-	-	-	80%	55%

3.6 Well-being

- + Happiness yesterday – affect
- + Life satisfaction – overall evaluation (11-17yrs)
- + Are the things you do worthwhile? – psychological/ eudaemonic well-being (11-17yrs)
- + Feeling positive about your future (11-17yrs)
- + Well-being scales – very high scores
- + Well-being scales – low scores
- + Gender differences: 11-17yrs
- + Low well-being

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Happiness yesterday



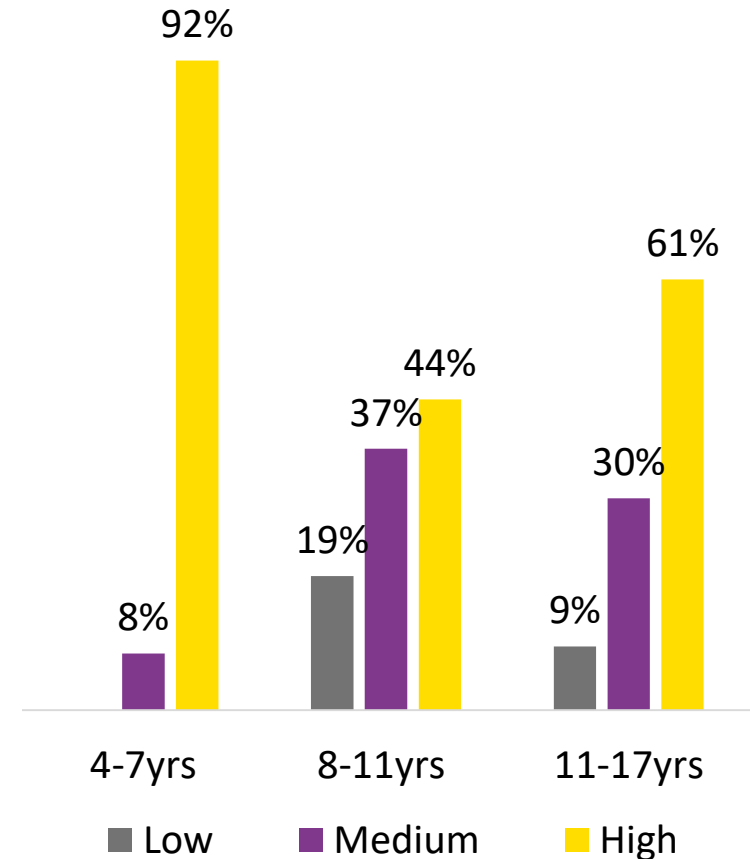
A decrease in happiness with age occurs in all surveys. Well-being decreases from school year 5 onwards with age 14-15yrs being the lowest point. It then starts to rise again (Rees *et al.*, 2010).

Children (4-7yrs & 8-11yrs) were asked to rate *how happy they were yesterday* on a five-point scale, from 'very unhappy' to 'very happy'.

Young people (11-17yrs) selected a point on a 0-10 scale with 0 being '*not at all happy*' and 10 '*completely happy*'.

- The majority of children and young people had been at least moderately happy the previous day.
- 3 (19%) children aged 8-11yrs, and 5 (9%) young people (11-17yrs) reported having been unhappy the previous day.
- None of the youngest children (4-7yrs) had been unhappy yesterday. **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**

Happiness yesterday



Life satisfaction (11-17yrs)



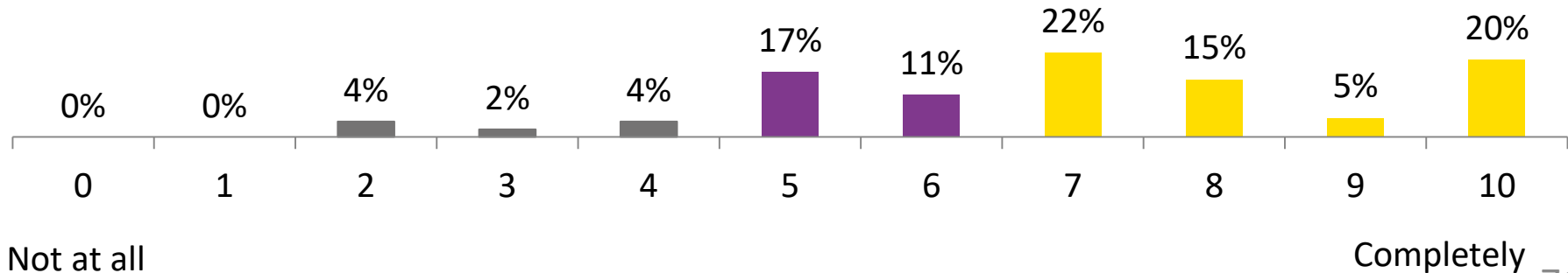
Young people (11-17yrs) were asked, *How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?* on a 0-10 scale.

This question exactly replicates The Children's Society survey question. A score of 7 or more is considered to be high life satisfaction.

- Like the general child population in England there was a positive correlation between high life satisfaction scores and being happy at school (Lewis et al., 2011).
- 62% of the young people were highly or very highly satisfied with their life as a whole.

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How satisfied are you with your life?



Are the things you do worthwhile? (11-17yrs)



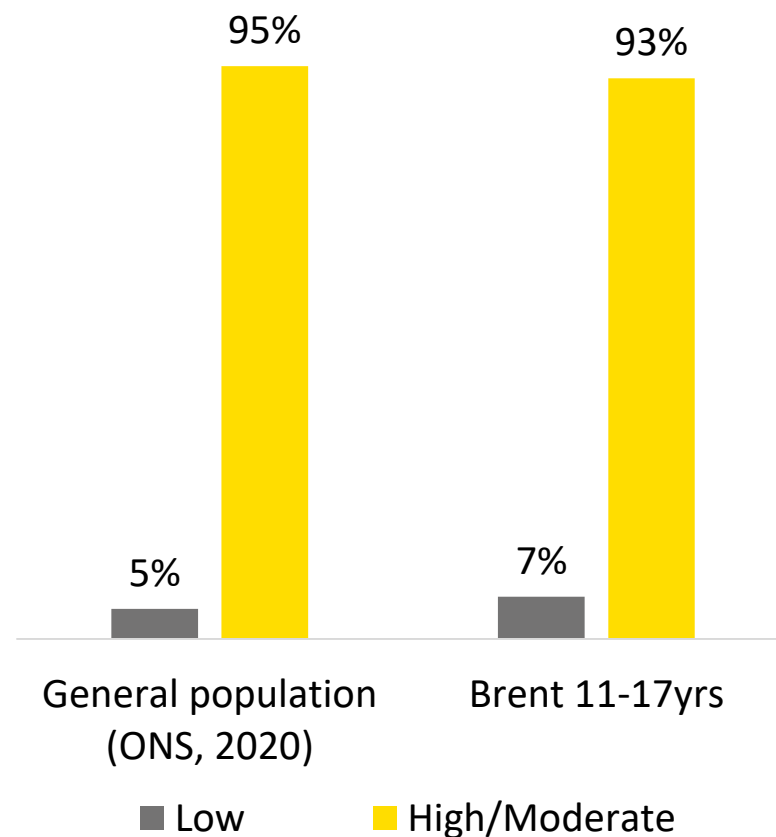
Having a meaning or a purpose to life is strongly associated with well-being (ONS, 2014).

Young people (11-17yrs) completed the same 0-10 scale as used by ONS (2020b) in their annual household survey.

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- 22% young people scored very highly;
- 39% highly
- 32% moderately; and
- 7% had low scores.
- Young people (11-17yrs) in Brent were statistically less likely than young people in other LAs to score very highly in terms of feeling the things they did in life were worthwhile (22% vs. 38%).

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



Feeling positive about your future



Optimism about the future is linked with happiness and resilience (Good Childhood Report, 2020).

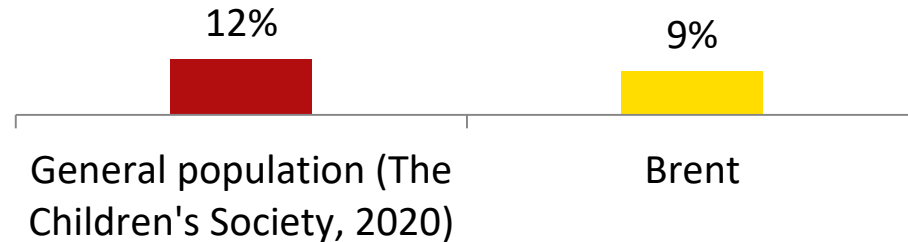
Young people (11-17yrs) were asked on a scale of 0-10, *How positive are you about your future?*

Being in care I have had the opportunity to meet new people. I have been given a new perspective about the future of my life.
11-17yrs

Young people who were pessimistic about their future

- 31 (58%) were positive about their future.
- 18 (33%) were moderately positive about their future.
- 5 (9%) had low scores, suggesting low levels of positivity about their future.

Compared to those in the general population, young people in Brent less often reported low levels of positivity about their future (12% vs. 9%). **This is a Bright Spot of practice.**



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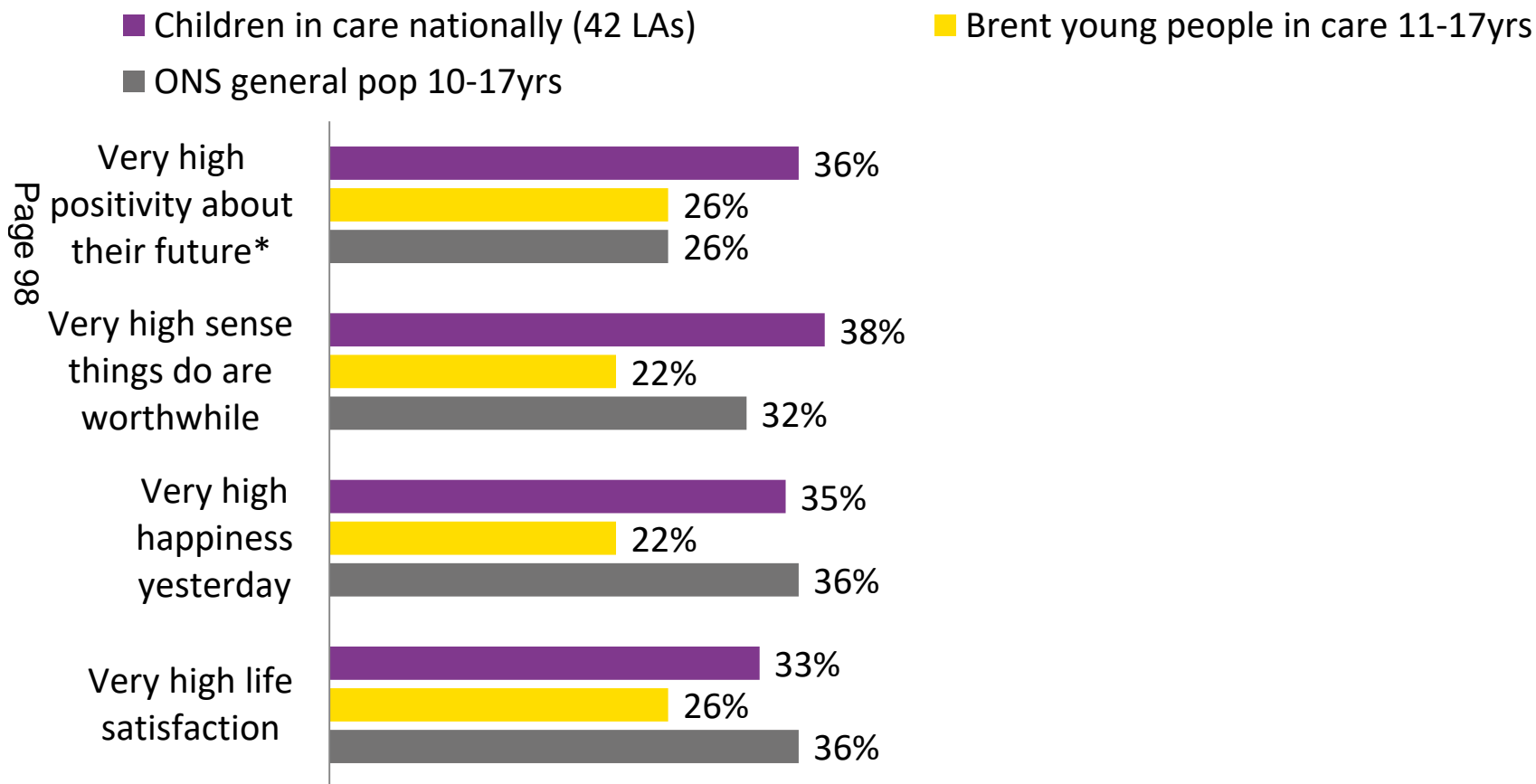
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Well-being scales – very high scores



Proportion of young people (11-17yrs) with very high well-being scores – comparison with general population and the average for looked after young people nationally (ONS Young people’s well-being measures 2020).

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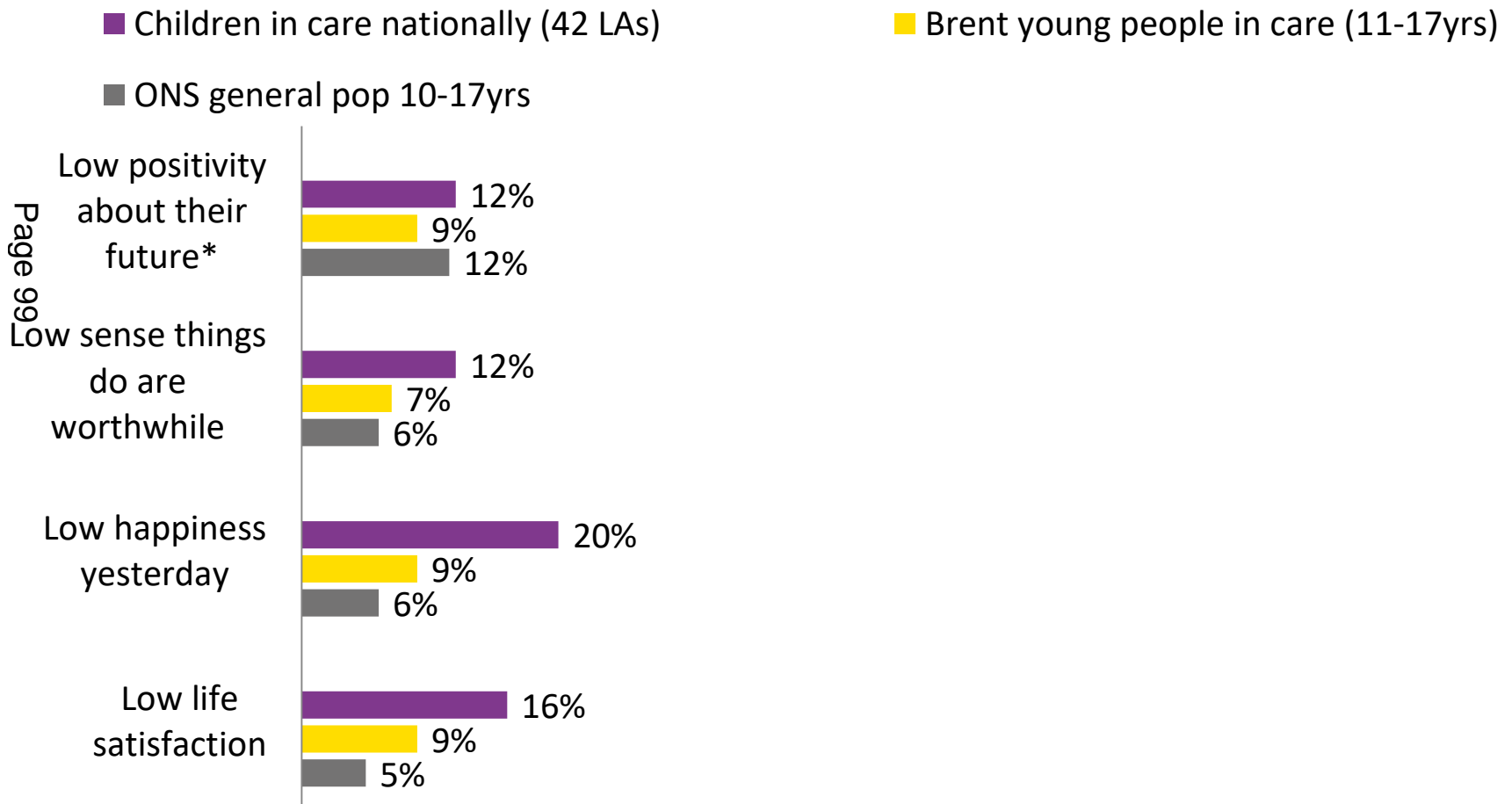
*Data taken from Good Childhood Report 2017

Well-being scales – low scores



Proportion of young people (11-17yrs) with low well-being scores – comparison with general population and the average for looked after young people nationally. (ONS Young people's well-being measures 2020)

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*Data taken from Good Childhood Report 2020.

Differences by sex: 11-17yrs



The Children's Society (2017) reported that in the general

population one in seven (14%) girls (10-15yrs) were unhappy with their lives as a whole as were one in ten boys.



- Gender was not associated with any of the following: life satisfaction, happiness, life being worthwhile, positivity about the future, low overall wellbeing.
- In Brent, girls were not statistically more likely to report unhappiness with their appearance.

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Examining gender differences in our surveys in 2017, we found no differences by sex in the surveys for 4-7yrs and 8-11yrs but girls aged 11-17yrs were more likely to report low well-being. Girls were four times more likely to be unhappy with their appearance and this contributed to differences in well-being depending on sex (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall 2017).

Low well-being: 4-7yrs



None of the children in the 4-7yrs group described themselves as *'quite unhappy'* or *'very unhappy'*.

Low well-being: 8-11yrs



3 (19%) of the children the 8-11yrs group described themselves as *'quite unhappy'* or *'very unhappy'*.

- All were girls of Asian ethnicity and living in foster care.
- Either they did not see their mothers or felt that they saw 'too little' of her.
- All worried about their feelings or behaviour.
- Two did not 'always' feel settled where they lived, two did not know that they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own and two 'sometimes' felt afraid to go to school because of bullying.

Low well-being: 11-17yrs



4 (7%) young people had low well-being (i.e. scored 4 or less on two or more of the 0-10 well-being scales).

Young people with low well-being were statistically more likely to report:







- Unhappiness with own appearance (75% of those with low well-being vs. 8% of those without).
- Feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying (100% of those with low well-being vs. 16% of those without).
- Feeling they didn't have a say in decisions social workers made about their life (50% of those with low well-being vs. 6% of those without).

Changes since last survey

Better than last survey

Similar percentage

Worse than last survey

		4-7yrs		8-11yrs		11-17yrs	
		YYYY-YY	2023-24	YYYY-YY	2023-24	YYYY-YY	2023-24
	'Quite' or 'very' happy yesterday	91%	100%	75%	81%	-	-
	High/very high happiness yesterday	-	-	-	-	76%	61%
	High/very high life satisfaction	-	-	-	-	74%	62%
	High/very high feeling things they do are worthwhile	-	-	-	-	79%	61%
	High/very high positivity about the future	-	-	-	-	76%	58%
	Low overall well-being	-	-	-	-	12%	7%

**Section 4:
Children and
young
people's
comments**

**Is there
anything
else you
would like
to tell us?**

**What would
make being
in care
better for
you?**

Comments: 4-7yrs

- 3 (27%) children responded to the questions:
Do you want to say anything else about being in care? What would make being in care better for you?

If I could move to a school near foster carer as every day you are late arriving at school. [Children that live by the carer all go to the same school and are friends, so she feels left out].

Really Happy!!! There are no problems at the house.

For there to be a real rainbow when I look out of my bedroom window... for me to be able to jump on clouds.

Comments: 8-11yrs

- 13 (81%) children responded to the questions: ***Do you want to say anything else about being in care? What would make being in care better for you?***
- Five children reported wanting to see more of their parents (especially mothers) or siblings, or they wanted to return home.
- Three children thought that there was 'nothing' needed to make being in care better.
- Others wanted to do more activities.
- One child was struggling to talk to their carer about religion.

Seeing my mummy and brothers and sisters.

I don't like being in care and I want to go back to staying with my mum.

Nothing really because I like everything now.

I would like to do more fun stuff like tennis.

A weekend abroad.

I find it hard to tell my foster carer that I don't want to follow their religion.

Comments: 11-17yrs

- 31 (57%) young people responded to the question: ***What would you change to make being in care better for you?***
- 11 reported that 'nothing' needed to change to make being in care better.
- 6 young people wanted more social events or fun activities.
- Others wanted to talk more to others, the opportunity to develop life skills, a more lenient curfew and immigration concerns resolved.

Timely intervention was also wanted, as was the need to be listened to.

Social workers actually listening and helping.

Not to be in care and be with parents.

More spaces for young people to chill and talk.

More opportunities to achieve more life skills.

More social events.

Nothing, am happy the way it is.

More adults I can speak to.

Nothing, I am happy with everything right now.

Nothing, I am happy with everything right now.

I want my immigration to be sorted as this makes me worried.

I would change how the care system works for example giving children more opportunities to do more. Fun things within Brent like going on more fun trips.

Comments: 11-17yrs (2)

- 19 (35%) young people responded to the question: ***What else do you want to say about being in care?***
- About two in five young people expressed only satisfaction with their care experience or praised their social workers.

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Others described both the challenges and benefits of their care experience. The need for more activities or opportunities whilst in care was identified, as was the need for careful placement matching and good introductions.

Matching more carefully to avoid move. Should be more introduction process to get to know. More options of families available to care.

Young people need more opportunities to do things that benefit us.

My social worker makes everything easy for me.

Depending on who you are with your day-to-day life in care can be either enjoyable or unenjoyable.

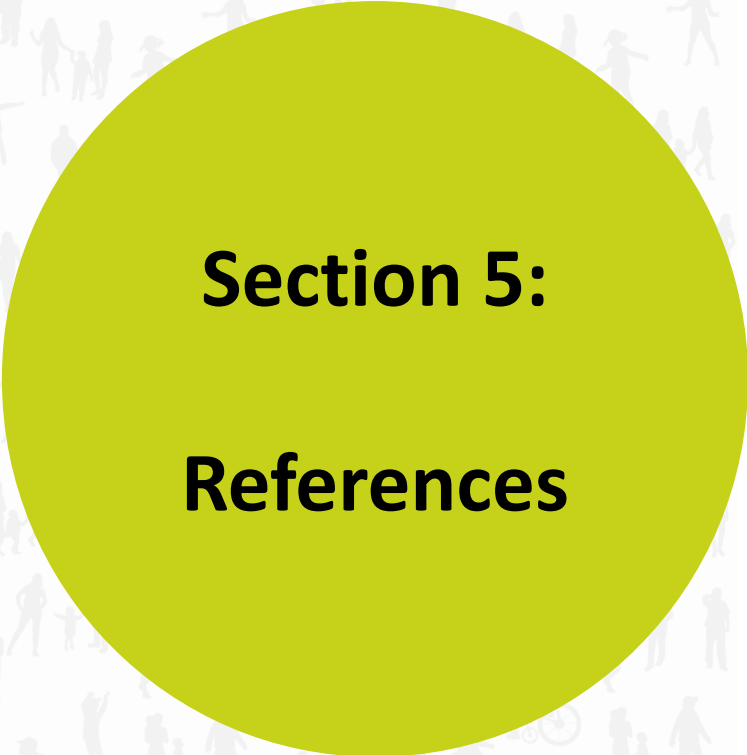
I enjoy my time in care right now. Hopefully things stay this way.

Being in care has not been easy but my social worker does her best for me.

Everything is fine. No complaints.

Young people need more activities to do.

Being in care I have had the opportunity to meet new people. I have been given a new perspective about the future of my life.



**Section 5:
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 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 14 October 2024</p>
	<p>Report from Director, Early Help and Social Care</p>
	<p>Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>Brent Care Leavers Local Offer 2024 - 2027</p>	

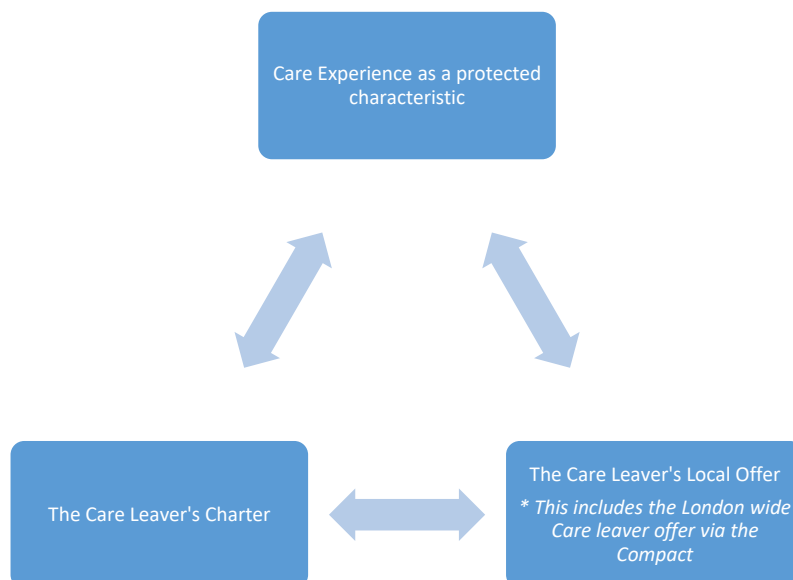
Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Care Leaver Local Offer 2. Care Leaver Local Offer- Design Draft 3. Care Leaver Charter
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Afzal Ahmed Service Manager for Leaving Care Afzal.ahmed@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report informs Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) of the updated Local Offer to Care Leavers. The Local Authority are required to consult on, and produce, a Local Offer for its Care Leavers, under Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Local Offer provides information about services and support available to Care Leavers from the local authority, including information about both statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide.
- 1.2 Our Care Leaver Local Offer has been in place since 2018 when it was first published, and then refreshed in 2022. This is the second refresh of our Local Offer.

- 1.3 Our Local Offer for care leavers works hand in hand with our Care Leavers Charter which provides commitment to care leavers and outlines the expectations young people can have when we work with them. The Charter has also been updated and is presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee as an appendix to this report.
- 1.4 Care as protected characteristic is a live discussion for Corporate Parenting Committee currently and introducing this would provide an overarching principle, ensuring that care experienced children and young people are not discriminated against.
- 1.5 There is a clear relationship between these three elements, the Local Offer, Charter and Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic. The monitoring of the offer and charter will in turn provide a mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of care as protected characteristic. This relationship is depicted in Graph 1 below.

Graph 1



2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 To review and note the contents of this report and to endorse the updated Care Leavers Local Offer (Appendix 1) and the work undertaken to date to ensure that the local authority and partners are effective corporate parents.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 This activity contributes to all five Borough priorities, by reviewing and refreshing our Care Leavers Local Offer we are ensuring that our looked after

children and care leavers receive the fullest support and opportunity available from their corporate parents.

The Best Start in Life

Aligned to the borough plan priority for parents, children and young people to get the best start in life, the local offer aims to ensure that care leavers receive the support they need, when they need it, particularly at the important point of transition to adulthood.

Prosperity and Stability

The Local Offer aims to tackle inequality and disproportionality for care experienced young people in London by creating a consistent response across local authority areas.

A Healthier Brent

In order for care experienced young people to have good health outcomes social determinants of health such as inequalities in housing, employment and income must be addressed. The Local Offer aims to address these inequalities.

A Cleaner, Greener Future

The Local Offer includes areas such as public transport travel which contributes to this priority.

Thriving Communities

In order for our care experienced young people to thrive and actively engage within their community, they require a whole council response to ensure that their needs are met. This Local Offer, alongside the Charter, represents Brent Council's commitment to these young people in line with our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

3.2 Looked after Children and Care Leavers

3.2.1 The term 'looked after' refers to any child or young person for whom the local authority has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom we provide care and accommodation on behalf of their parent. The term "child" can refer to any child or young person aged 0 to 18 years. The Council also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave their long-term care from the age of 18 years until they reach the age of 21, or 25 if they are in further or higher education. One of the key changes in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 is that the duty and responsibility to all care leavers is extended to 25 regardless of their education or employment status.

3.2.2 As of 31st March 2024, Brent was responsible for 564 care leavers of which 134 were aged between 22 and 25.

4.0 Brent Local Offer

4.1 This report proposes a revised Brent Local Offer for Care Leavers. Sections 1 to 3 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires every Local Authority to consult on and publish a Local Offer for Care Leavers. For clarity, a care leaver is a young person aged 16-25 years old who has been 'looked after' at some point since they were 14 years old and were in care on or after their

16th birthday. Once approved by the CPC, the Care Leavers Local Offer will be published on the Brent website and updated on an ongoing basis.

- 4.2 The Local Offer provides information about what services and support are available to all Brent Care Leavers from all partner agencies. It also provides information about what financial support is available to Care Leavers. It is a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities to provide a Local Offer for Care Leavers and to review this on a regular basis, which we are committed to every 3 years.
- 4.3 Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires Brent to publish information about:
- Services that Brent offers to care leavers.
 - Any other service Brent offers that may assist care leavers in preparing for adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and well-being, relationships, education & training, employment, and participation in society.
- 4.4 The main changes in the revised local offer, including the commitments made as part of the Care Leavers Compact, are as follows:
- All eligible care leavers will be able to apply for the Digital Resident Support Fund for a device and 12-month free fibre connectivity in their home.
 - All eligible care leavers claiming universal credit will be able to apply for free internet access from TalkTalk (internet provider).
 - Our current work with Grandmentors will expand to recruit mentors from within the Council to offer mentorship to our care leavers this could be as simple as help with their CV, or support if they move to their own tenancy, or more intensive mentoring over a longer period.
 - We will offer a rent deposit scheme to care leavers for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option.
 - Care leavers can apply for half price bus and tram travel, we will pay the difference if the young person is in education, employment, or training.
 - Statutory guidance requires local authorities to provide a leaving care allowance, to enable care leavers to purchase essentials (such as furniture, white goods and carpets/curtains) when they move into their first home. The allowance has been increased to £3000 for care leavers, or £3250 if you are a care leaver and single parent.
 - festival and birthday allowances will rise in line with similar London local authorities.
- 4.5 To ensure that high quality services are offered, the proposed offer has been compared with neighbouring London local authorities. This confirms that the proposed offer to Brent Care Leavers is appropriate, in line with comparable neighbours and that it meets the needs of our Care Leavers, supporting them towards independence.

5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 5.1 The development of this Local Offer has involved teams within the local authority and health partners. In April 2024, council services came together in the Senior Management Group (SMG) to review the current local offer. The SMG sessions were planned and co-produced with care experienced young people and Brent Care Journeys. There was also online consultation questionnaire which was launched in January 2024 to get views from care leavers over 76 responses were received about the local offer. We also carried out focus groups with young people including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), young people leaving custody and young parents.
- 5.2 The session with SMG in April did not result in many immediate, tangible offers for care leavers, however it was a well-received session that raised senior leaders understanding regarding their corporate parenting responsibilities for care experienced young people and generated a lot of discussion and ideas. Immediately following this session colleagues from the Brent Communication Team reached out and supported the service to initiate a WhatsApp Channel for Care Leavers which will allow the service to “push” information out to all young people who are signed up to the group. Currently we have approximately 100 young people in this group, with incentives being provided to encourage all care leavers to join. This has and will continue to address one of our primary concerns about communicating the Local Offer and other information with care leavers in a consistent, fair and transparent way. We were also able to immediately start working with Brent Transformation team to access the Brent Resident Fund for care leaver access to laptops/tablets and free Wi-Fi.
- 5.3 Other areas of future potential offers are still being discussed and developed following ongoing engagement with young people:
- Prioritise social value outcomes from our commissioning contracts to create jobs/training for our care leavers
 - Reserving placements for care leavers on graduate training
 - Extending the current Brent Resident Fund pilot to include mobile phones/laptops to care leavers
 - Brent staff mentors for care leavers
- 5.4 The key message from the online consultation was that young people were most concerned about finding the right accommodation and finding the right job followed by rising cost of living. They wanted to know about the Local Offer through the council website, by email, or from their Personal Advisor.
- 5.5 Young people requested an “easy to read” document, in a simple format and it be available in young people’s spoken language (offer will be available in a range of dialects).
- 5.6 This revised and updated version of the Care Leavers Local Offer will be simplified, condensed, and will outline all the services available to Brent Care Leavers, including financial support. A draft version is attached as Appendix 2.

5.7 It is proposed that the updated Brent Leaver Local Offer will be published on the Council's website and sent to all Brent Care Leavers through the Brent Care Leavers WhatsApp channel.

6.0 Pan London Care Leavers Compact

6.1 A report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee on the 16 October 2023 on our progress made against the compact. The Council endorsed the adoption of the Compact and supports its implementation across the council. The commitments made via the Compact have been incorporated into the revised Local Offer.

7.0 Brent Care Leavers Charter

7.1 The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents. The Brent Care Leavers Charter has been updated in line with the Brent Local Offer and the final design of the Charter will be completed in partnership with young people during this current quarter. Content of the updated Charter can be found at Appendix 3.

8.0 Financial Considerations

8.1 The only new additional commitment is the small increase in the holiday/birthday allowance included in paragraph 4.5. This will be funded from the Leaving Care budgets and managed as part of the annual inflationary allowances.

9.0 Legal Considerations

9.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 makes provisions concerning looked after children and Care Leavers to improve support to promote their welfare and safeguarding.

10.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

10.1 The Local Offer contributes to our Corporate Parenting responsibilities to care experienced young people, ensuring that they are not further disadvantaged because of their adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and have the best opportunity to succeed in all aspects of their adult lives.

11.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

11.1 At this stage there are no climate change or environmental considerations.

12.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

12.1 At this stage there are no human resource or property considerations.

13.0 Communication Considerations

13.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People

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Our Offer to Care Leavers 2024 - 2026

Introduction

As your corporate parent, Brent Council continues to be responsible for you after you turn 18. We must make sure that you are safe, healthy and are achieving your goals. As any good parent, we want to make sure you have the best possible support to help you thrive as you transition into adulthood.

We will do our best to help you achieve your full potential. We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own. Being a good parent means keeping in touch and providing you with the support you need to meet your individual needs.

Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go for advice and help.

This local offer is made by Brent Council to all care leavers and sets out how we will support you.

To be able to get the support set out in this offer, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. Your personal advisor will talk with you about the information in this offer.

Support we must provide by law

Following changes introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, you can ask for support from your personal advisor until you reach the age of 25. This is to make sure you receive similar support that young adults who live with their families would normally expect.

Personal Advisor

Once you turn 18, in most cases, you'll no longer have a social worker, so your personal advisor, we call them PAs, will make sure you get the services you need and help co-ordinate your pathway plan and reviews.

Your PA is there to help you to think about your future, what you are studying, what you want to do in the future and your independence skills. Your PA will talk to you and other people who are important to you to find out more about you and your needs.

Your PA can help you with lots of things in your life. The main things they will do are:

- Be involved in understanding your needs and preparing your Pathway Plan so that you can get a good idea of what you want to do with your life
- Review your Pathway Plan at least every six months to help you to stay on track and achieve the things you want from life
- Financial assistance towards an activity twice a year that you and your personal advisor can do together

- With your agreement, seek the views of our partner agencies when completing your pathway plan. This may include housing, education, training and employment providers, benefits and health services. PAs will also liaise with youth offending services and probation if needed
- Even if your case has been closed you can still get in touch with us before your 25th birthday and we will assess what help or assistance we may be able to give you
- If you are a disabled care leaver and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014, a social worker will regularly review your Care and Support Plan to ensure that the right support is in place to meet your assessed needs. The Care and Support Plan must be reviewed at least once a year.

Support we Offer

Education, Employment and Training

Good parents want to help their children achieve the right qualifications, training and skills to enable them to succeed in life. As your corporate parent, we want to make sure you have this solid foundation so that you are able to find the right career and job that goes with it. To do this we will make sure you have good advice, support and assistance.

If you have an Education Health and Care Plan, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2014 states that your plan will need to be maintained and reviewed by our Special Education Needs team until you reach the goals set out in the plan, or your 25th birthday.

The law says we must provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training. In particular:

- We will provide you with a Higher Education (HE) bursary of £2,000 if you go to University, to help with books and materials, this will be paid in equal instalment over the duration of your degree course (incl. your foundation year)
- We will provide somewhere for you to stay during your summer University holiday (or funding if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in higher education or in residential further education. This will be based on a financial assessment carried out by your personal advisor.

Our other education and training support offer to you includes:

- A guaranteed offer of a careers appointment with Brent Virtual School or Prospects (Connexions) to discuss your career options post 18. Prospects are able to help you in CV writing, improve your job interviews skills, and help you apply for employment, education, or training opportunities
- A care leavers link on the Brent Works portal highlighting specific training and employment opportunities available in Brent
- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews
- Support, if not available through student finance, to purchase course equipment up to £100
- We will encourage you to work through the national ASDAN Living Independently Award, to help you gain skills for independent living
- We will encourage you to attend The Gordon Brown residential weekend to test out your independent living skills before you are nominated for your own tenancy.
- Support and advice if you choose to go to university, such as helping you apply for tuition fees and maintenance loan

- In partnership with Brent Works we will send your personal advisor employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities to help you get into employment, training or an apprenticeship scheme within the council or elsewhere
- A Department of Work and Pensions worker linked to the leaving care team who is able to assist you in claiming benefits and avoid you getting undue benefit sanctions
- A celebration event to share the positive education and training experiences of care leavers
- An annual review of your education health and care plan in line with SEND Code of Practice.

Accommodation

Your PA will help you to find suitable accommodation. We will work with you to ensure you are provided with the most suitable housing options. Our accommodation support offer to you includes:

The law says the following about how we must support you with your accommodation:

- We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18, but if you choose to leave care before the age of 18 we must provide you with suitable accommodation.

Our other accommodation support offer to you includes:

- Supported accommodation if you are not ready for your tenancy
- Welcome Pack when you first move to supported accommodation (given by the provider), which will include cooking utensils, cups and saucers, kettle and toaster amongst other essential items provided the
- Supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what's called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This will be reviewed every six months as part of your pathway plan review to make sure its meeting your needs
- Supported lodgings if you have a disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014
- Return to your family if it is safe for you to do so and if you have a disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014, a care package to support you and your parents
- Residential Care if you have a profound disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014
- Once you have reached the stage where you can live independently and completed the ASDAN independent living booklet, attended the Gordon Brown residential weekend, and MyBank course which are part of the pre-tenancy requirement and mandatory. You will then have the option to apply for your own tenancy in Brent (occasionally this may be outside of Brent). Your housing application will be assessed, and you'll initially be given the option to bid for a bedsit for three months before being placed on a waiting list for a Direct Offer (managed by Brent housing or a housing association provider)
- As a care leaver you will be given priority Band B and you will have 3 months to bid for a property on 'Locata'. If you have not secured a property after bidding for 3 months you will be automatically added to the waiting list for a direct offer, alternatively, you can also explore private rental accommodation options
- We will offer a rent deposit scheme to care leavers for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option
- Workshops to receive advice about holding down a tenancy, including avoiding rent arrears, paying bills and budgeting effectively
- A 'Setting up Home Allowance' of £3,000 (based on assessed need) for items you need to set up home like appliances, bedding and furniture. If you are parent, you will be entitled to £3200

- If you don't want to live in Brent because you have friends, family or connections elsewhere your PA will offer advice and support you to approach another local authority for where you wish to live to see if they are able to assist you
- To give you advice to prevent you from becoming intentionally homeless and support to sustain your tenancy.

Your Health & Wellbeing

Looking after your physical health and mental wellbeing is extremely important as you get older. Your personal advisor will provide advice, support, and encouragement to you so that you have every opportunity to lead a healthy and active lifestyle. Our health and wellbeing offer to you includes:

- If you live in Brent, you can access a free annual gym membership through Everyone Active. If you live outside Brent, we will support you with free annual gym membership at Pure Gym or an alternative gym up to the age of 21. This will be reviewed annually please speak to your personal advisor on the eligibility criteria.
- Before you reach 18, you will receive a copy of your Care Leaver Health Summary from your social worker. The Care Leaver Health Summary will contain a summary of your medical history, including a list of immunisations you have had.
- Provide you with information about counselling and mental health services that are available locally and support you to move from children's services to adult services if you need to.
- You will be given a copy of the Health Information Booklet which gives you details of local services and your entitlements – your personal advisor will go through the booklet with you during a leaving care visit or when you have your pathway plan review.
- Support to register with a doctor, dentist and optician.
- Providing information on healthy living including 'Staying Healthy' sessions.
- We will, depending on assessment of need, provide assistance towards certain medical costs if they are not covered by the NHS. This particularly applies to young people with no recourse to public funds.
- If you are assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014 because you have been diagnosed with ASD or Learning Disability an annual health check will be completed by your doctor.

Managing Money and Financial Support

We will provide you with support to become financially independent, in a similar way to how other parents support their own children.

The law and the guidance says:

- We can, depending on assessment of need, provide you financial assistance towards expenses relating to education, employment or training and also access to other sources of funding such as college or university funds or from the Department of Works and Pensions.

Our additional support offer to you includes:

- Support to apply for universal credit or other benefits
- We will offer you financial support whilst you are making your initial benefit application until the first payment is received.
- Offering you the opportunity to attend relevant money management courses
- Information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the council)

- Support to open a bank account
- Support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport and/or provisional driving licence, before or if required after your 18th birthday
- You will be exempt from paying Council Tax until the age of 25 years, only after you have maximised the council tax rebate because you are on low income, a student or receiving universal credit
- Signpost to relevant charities or organisations where you could obtain advice on immigration matters.
- Financial support in exceptional emergencies based on your financial assessment undertaken by your personal advisor.
- Help you to apply for the 'Brent Digital Support Offer' for a laptop and internet connectivity.
- All eligible care leavers claiming universal credit will be able to apply for free internet access from TalkTalk (internet provider).
- Help you claim for half price bus and tram travel concession through London Transport.

Relationships

As well as support from a Personal Advisor, we will offer you additional practical and emotional support, such as:

- Help you to identify the people most important to you. We can help you to maintain or regain contact with these people who are special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers, independent visitors, or social workers
- Support to re-connect with family where it is in your best interest
- Signpost you to an advocate if you need one
- If you already have an 'independent visitor' before the age of 18, continuing to support to maintain contact with your 'independent visitor'
- Life skills workshops that will focus on practical skills and managing relationships
- Group work with former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children regarding relationships to minimise risks of isolation.

Supported to be a Parent

If you are a parent or if you are expecting a baby, we will support you to do the best for them.

- Your GP and midwife can talk to you about the health services available to you
- Your personal adviser can give you information about universal services, financial support and schemes in place to support you
- Your personal adviser can refer you to your local Brent Family Wellbeing Centre, which is a great way to meet other parents and access a wide range of community services and resources for yourself and your child
- If you are a first-time parent, we can make a referral for you to the family nurse partnership for extra support
- We will provide you with a hamper of baby goodies to celebrate the arrival of your new baby
- Invite you to our parenting group when one is running.

Support for young people in custody

We will continue to offer you financial support and a personal adviser, up to the age of 21 or up to 25 depending on individual circumstances, who will visit you to review your pathway plan and prepare for your release from custody.

If you are in custody you will receive:

- £20 per month so that you can pay for food and toiletries from the canteen
- On release from custody for more than a year each care leaver will receive up to £100 to pay for initial expenses.

Getting Your Voice Heard

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. We can help you participate in society in the following ways:

- Encourage you to join our What's App channel called 'Care Leavers Hub' where we will post details of events, workshops and a chance to win a prize in our 3 monthly draw.
- Support you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections
- Provide information on groups and clubs you may wish to join
- Option to complete your pathway plan through a digital app.
- Making sure that your personal advisor talks to you about the local offer in your pathway plan review meetings.
- Get involved in Brent Youth Parliament
- Informing you about voluntary work that you may be interested in
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver
- You will have access to our Children and Young People's participation service called Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) where you can meet other young people, take part in fun activities and outings, and get involved in decision making on matters that affect children in care and care leavers.
- There are also opportunities to get involved in council decision making by participating in Corporate Parenting Committees or becoming a Youth Ambassador or by contributing to commissioning services or joining an interview panel for recruiting senior council staff.

1. Who else can help?

As a care leaver, there is a range of support services available to you. We have put together a list of useful contact details. If there is anything you do not understand or need further information about then please speak to your PA.

Brent Leaving Care Team Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley.	Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm Duty Number 0208 379 4612 or 4613 during office hours, 24 hour emergency number 0208 863 5250
Disabled Childrens Team	Brent's Family Front Door on 020 8937 4300.
Brent Complaints Team	Tel: 020 8937 1234 or Email: complaints.service@brent.gov.uk
Independent Advocacy – Coram	Tel: 0808 800 5792

[Brent Care Leavers Charter](#): You will find the link to Brent Care Leavers' Charter here;
[Brent Care Leavers Charter.pdf](#)

Other places you can go for help:

- Rees: The Care Leavers Foundation <https://www.reesfoundation.org> Provides small grants for care leavers aged 18-25;
- The care leavers association <http://www.careleavers.com> A charity aimed at improving the lives of care leavers;
- Become <http://www.becomecharity.org.uk> Online advice and information for care leavers;
- Propel <http://propel.org.uk/UK> Information on what support is available for care leavers at university;
- Shelter <https://england.shelter.org.uk> Provides housing advice;
- National government benefits calculator <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators> Information on benefits;
- Citizens Advice Bureau <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> Information about money, benefits, your rights, employment, housing and the law.
- Care Leavers Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports care leavers aged 16-25 to live independently [Home - Care Leaver Covenant \(mycovenant.org.uk\)](https://www.home-care-leaver-covenant.org.uk) it also has several business offering discounts to care leavers.
- Young Brent Foundation works with young people in Brent: <https://youngbrentfoundation.org.uk/>

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CARE LEAVERS LOCAL OFFER

Page 133

Click [HERE](#)
to get started



Introduction
to Leaving
Care



Education,
Training and
Employment

Important
Documents



Getting your
Voice Heard



Where you
will live

Health



Financial
Support



**"This is our offer to you, it sets out how we will support
you during your journey into adulthood"
*Brent Corporate Parenting Service***

INTRODUCTION TO LEAVING CARE

THIS SECTION INCLUDES:

- » What does 'being a care leaver' mean?
- » Your Leaving Care Worker
- » Your Pathway Plan
- » Continuing Support 21 – 25
- » Eligibility – see Appendix

2

WHAT DOES BEING A CARE LEAVER MEAN?

We continue to be responsible for you after you turn 18. We must make sure you are safe, healthy and are achieving your goals.

Our Care Leavers Local Offer sets out what support we can offer you, we know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own. For example, we will help you with educational support, finding suitable employment, housing, and managing your money.

YOUR LEAVING CARE WORKER

Once you turn 18 you will be supported by a Personal Advisor (PA) from the Leaving Care Team. The level of support you receive from your leaving care worker will vary, depending on your individual circumstances.

HOME

To contact the team:

Call: **0208 379 4612** (9am – 5pm Monday to Friday)

Address: **Leaving Care Team**, Brent Civic Centre,
Engineers Way, Wembley, HA9 0FJ

YOUR PATHWAY PLAN

Here at the Leaving Care Team we want to help you achieve your goals. Your Pathway Plan will set out the individual package of support that we will provide whilst you get used to independent living. We will review your plan at least twice each year and meet with you regularly to check how your goals are going.

MY PLAN

BRENT CARE LEAVERS' CHARTER

We will ensure that all children and young people in and leaving our care have the right support to keep them safe and to help them grow into happy, healthy and fulfilled young adults who are optimistic about their future.

WE PROMISE

TO RESPECT AND HONOUR YOUR IDENTITY

- We will respect your personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage.
- We will support you to become the person you want to be.

TO BELIEVE IN YOU

- We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations and career goals.

TO LISTEN TO YOU

- We will listen to your feelings and you can tell us what help you need to be a young adult.
- We will promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.
- We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes.

TO INFORM YOU

- We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us. The information will be presented in a way that you want.
- We will make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information and to put on record any disagreement with the content.

TO PROVIDE YOU WITH INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TO HELP YOU HAVE GOOD PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH


- We will encourage you to make healthy and positive choices for your life.
- We will provide you with information and advice about healthy eating, exercise, smoking, drugs and sexual health and mental well-being.

TO SUPPORT YOU

- We will help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events.
- We will help you to get support if you have any concerns regarding your physical, mental or emotional health.
- We will provide guidance on your next steps in life – in terms of education, finances, leaving care and more.
- As well as information, advice, practical and financial help, we will provide emotional support.
- We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try to help you find a service that can.

TO FIND YOU A HOME AND LIVE INDEPENDENTLY

- We will provide you with support and guidance to equip you for independent living.
- We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life.
- We will encourage you to achieve your career and employment goals.
- We will work together with the services you need to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. These services can include housing, benefits, health services, training providers, colleges and universities.
- We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you.

 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 14 October 2024</p>
	<p>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</p>
	<p>Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report: 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024</p>	
Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West Brent's Regional Adoption Agency GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk</p> <p>Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:

- adoption performance data for the period 1 April 2024– 30 September 2024
- the progress and activity of Adopt London West
- how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

Information and child level data presented in Section 5 of this report is provided by Brent CYP; the remainder of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

- 1.2 This is the ninth report presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in this format as Cabinet gave approval in April 2019 for Brent council to:
- a) join the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt London West (ALW) consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and
 - b) delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children’s Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care to agree and enter into a Partnership Agreement with participating boroughs.
- 1.3 The Key Decision was made on 2 September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West has been a ‘live’ RAA since October 2019.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on, and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the adoption service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children. This is in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014).

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 This report sets out the provision and management of the local authority’s adoption service and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of ALW contributes to the following borough priorities:

- **The Best Start in Life**
- **Prosperity and Stability**
- **A Healthier Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**

In order for care experienced young people to have the best start in life, prosperity and stability, safety, and good health they need safe, stable, permanent homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs throughout their minority. The work of ALW and the LAC and Permanency service contribute to these priorities by ensuring permanency is achieved for children and young people either via a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Adoption. Providing safe, stable, permanent, loving placements for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

3.2 Background - Adopt London West

- 3.2.1 Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency became operational on 1 September 2019 with a formal launch in October 2019.
- 3.2.2 A comprehensive partnership agreement forms the basis of the ongoing service arrangements. The Partnership Board on which the Strategic Director, Brent CYP is a member of continues to provide the necessary oversight to ensure that the shared service is appropriately scrutinised and supported to deliver improved outcomes for children and adopters.
- 3.2.3 As part of the national RAA implementation and development programme a network of RAA leaders has been established and a national strategic lead appointed. Government published a National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, that sets out ambitions to further improve the consistency of support offered to adopters and achieve innovation and change in various aspects of the adoption system. Monthly meetings take place attended by the Department for Education (DfE) who remain interested and engaged in the RAA delivery model.
- 3.2.4 National priorities have been agreed by the network of RAA leaders and several workstreams established to progress specific elements of the National Adoption Strategy. ALW's Partnership Board and Heads of Service meetings will continue to be informed of practice changes and developments and will closely monitor performance and practice to ensure standards of service to children and their families remain consistently high.

4.0 Responsibilities

- 4.1 As delegated in the partnership agreement between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, Ealing (as the host Local Authority for ALW) is responsible for ensuring that children whose permanence plan is adoption in all four partner Local Authorities are matched in a timely way with adopters who best meet the needs of those children. This involves featuring children in various profiling events, via national linking websites, supporting them in adoption activity days and networking events with other Regional Adoption Agencies in London and nationally. ALW is also responsible for the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, supporting adopters with family finding following approval, and the on-going post placement support to adopters and special guardians. ALW is also responsible for the provision of services to adopted adults and all those affected by adoption who request a specific service or an assessment of need.
- 4.2 ALW provides a service to Brent residents who wish to make a private application to adopt their partner's child. These are non-agency adoptions and often referred to as "step-parent" adoption, or special guardians who may wish to adopt the child in their care. The team is also involved in completing adoption reports on children who may have travelled from and been adopted abroad; there is a legal requirement for these adoptions to be made lawful in the UK.

- 4.3 Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), with whom a service level agreement is in place.
- 4.4 Statutory social work in relation to children needing adoptive placements remains the responsibility of Brent CYP. The care plans for children are formulated by the social work teams and agreed by Head of Service for LAC and Permanency. The Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes then considers and ratifies any adoption plans.

5.0 Performance Data

- 5.1 Brent's 3-year performance for 2021-24 is not yet published, but our local data tells us:
- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 503 days (3-year average) (464 in the last 12 months) compared with 447 days in 2022-23.
 - **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 180 days (3-year average) (223 in the last 12 months) compared with 140 days in 2022-23.
 - **A20** (The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child): 380 days (3-year average) (481 days in the last 12 months)

6.0 Child related data

- 6.1 There have been 3 Adoption Orders granted between 01/04/2024 and 30/09/2024.
- 6.2 There have been 3 children placed for adoption in the first 6 months of this reporting year.
- 6.3 There have been 2 placement orders granted during this period.
- 6.4 There are currently 18 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
- Eight children are placed with their new families, five have been placed in this reporting period, 3 of those are placed with adopters approved by ALW
 - Nine children are subject to a Placement Order, it is expected that four of these children will be matched with their new families in the next 2 months and begin the process of introductions. All four of these children are to be placed with ALW approved adopters if plans progress as expected.
 - ALW and Brent are exploring potential families for the rest of the children who are subject to a Placement Order

- One child has a plan of Adoption agreed by Brent, but no Court order has yet been granted.

6.5 Early Permanence for Children

For some children it is appropriate to consider placing them with foster carers who are also approved adopters, this is referred to as an Early Permanence placement. This enables the child to be placed earlier than is usually possible and before Court proceedings have concluded. Three of the children placed this year have been placed in Early Permanence placements, allowing the children to spend less time in foster care and begin building attachments to their new families.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 20 Adopter households have been approved in 2023/24.

The target for recruitment of adopters remains at 30, however, this is not achievable with the current resource of 2.5 assessment social workers. One additional social worker was agreed by the Partnership Board at the last meeting. It is hoped that this will increase assessment activity.

Only 5 Adopter households have been approved so far in this reporting period, this is lower than anticipated with some assessments delayed due to the applicants' personal circumstances. 80% are White British, 20% are Black Caribbean, 20% of these approved adopters identify as LGBTQ.

The profile of adopters recruited in this period does broadly match the needs of Brent children with the exception of Black Adopters. 3 out of 5 Brent children placed this year have been with ALW Adopters, and there are a further 4 Brent children linked with ALW adopters who will hopefully be successfully matched and placed within the next 2/3 months. The lack of Black adopters is well documented and the reason why the Black Adoption Project was established.

7.2 There are currently 35 ALW approved adopters: 22 of whom already have a child/children placed with them, 9 are in the active family finding stage, 6 of these families are already matched or linked with children 3 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances, 2 are likely to resign as adopters.

7.3 The adoption assessment process comprises 2 stages. Stage 1 assessments should take place within 2 months 60 days, this stage is described as "adopter led", where adopters work through exercises and complete various tasks that contribute to a full and thorough assessment of their suitability. DfE Adoption and Special Guardianship data for 2023/24 shows the England average for Stage 1 was 134 days, the London average was 193 days, ALW average = 147 days.

- 7.4 Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months 182 days, this is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months. Adoption and Special Guardianship data for 2023/24 shows the England average for Stage 2 is 150 days, London average at 160 days and ALW average = 147 days.
- 7.5 There are 16 families in the formal stages of assessment. 9 are in Stage 1, and 7 in or about to commence Stage 2.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1 ALW is currently offering a service to 269 Brent children, families or individuals who are accessing their adoption records – 23 children are allocated to a social worker for family finding, 26 are receiving a Social Work service, 42 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service that is under review. 30 people have received an Access to Records service so far in this reporting year.
- 8.2 There are 148 contact cases open relating to Brent families - 36 direct contact arrangements and 112 active letterbox exchanges.

9.0 Adoption Support Fund

- 9.1 Families who require specialist therapeutic support, are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services. 26 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this reporting year so far and a total of £67,747 of funding for therapeutic services received for these families.
- 9.2 There are currently no families waiting for an application to the ASF; all assessments for support are allocated.

10.0 ALW Adoption Panel

- 10.1 The role of ALW's panel is as follows:
- to consider the presentation of approvals, reviews, and terminations of adopters' suitability to adopt, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to ALW's Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service) for a formal decision.
 - to consider whether a child whose parent/s are consenting to their adoption, (formerly referred to as a relinquished baby) from Brent should be placed for adoption, following which a recommendation is made by panel members but sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge; and
 - to consider adoption matches between Brent's children and their prospective adopters, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Director,

Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge.

- 10.2 Feedback between ALW and Brent is considered by the Heads of Service quality assurance group and the Partnership Board and shared with Service Managers in Brent after each panel presentation to aid service development and quality assure the work of the RAA.
- 10.3 ALW Panel continues to take place virtually via Microsoft Teams. Prior to each panel meeting, the Adviser liaises with the applicants and external professionals to support them to access Microsoft Teams to reduce the risk of delay on the day and explain how the panel day will run and confirm that they are able to access the meeting confidentially. Panel members and observers also complete and return a confidentiality self-declaration, attesting to this for the duration of the panel meeting.
- 10.4 During the period under review, 5 new Adopter households have been approved since April 2024 and 6 Brent children have been formerly matched with their new families by the Agency following positive recommendations from the Adoption panel. 3 children have been placed "in-house" with ALW adopters and 2 children have been placed with adopters from another adoption agency.
- 10.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, a series of practice development discussions have taken place throughout the year with panel members. Training for all Adopt London panel members is planned for November 2024 on a new practice model for considering transracial and trans cultural placements, AFDIT (Anti -racist framework for decision making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families) Dr Tam Kane, University of Sussex.

11.0 Adoption practice updates

National

Adoption England Strategy 2024-27 published



ALW development plan aligns to the 5 national outcomes set out below. Adopt London HOS group and ALW staff are involved across some of the working groups progressing culture change and practice development initiatives. Training to LA partners reflects national work and modernising of Adoption agenda, there is a particular emphasis on work for children to maintain relationships with their birth families.

Outcomes for 2024-2027

In the next 3 years, 2024 -27, Adoption England will prioritise supporting the delivery of the following outcomes:



Adopt London Black Adoption Project

Black Adoption Project

Funding

- Funding awarded by Adoption England - £250k over 18 months
- Support at funding workshop from Ann Graham as BAP 'ambassador' and stakeholders proved effective
- Employed F/T Programme Lead to launch pilots, develop stakeholder relationships, support comms and awareness-raising activities
- Funds allow for external support to evaluate pilots
- All learning to be shared nationally through RAA Leaders group as well as boroughs and public forums

 **LAURELLE BROWN**
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY



Black Adoption Project

Recruitment approach

Used non-traditional approaches to Programme Lead recruitment:

- Information video available online
- Interview questions provided in advance
- 95% candidates from Global Majority
- High level of stakeholder involvement & decision making - 2 project members compared to 5 external stakeholders directly involved in interview panels (4 with lived experience of adoption)

Evaluation to be shared, webinar in October (please share)

 **LAURELLE BROWN**
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY



Black Adoption Project

Safer Spaces sessions

- Second phase of monthly 'Safer Spaces' session for Black staff
- Review identified need to use the term 'safer'
- Very well received by staff who attend with positive feedback
- Reasonably low attendance – main barrier is caseload and work pressures
- Identifying mechanisms for group to feedback themes or challenge to Heads of Service

"I've felt so supported by a group, every time I come and share. I haven't experienced this type of space in a workplace before and I just want to say how much I value this group."

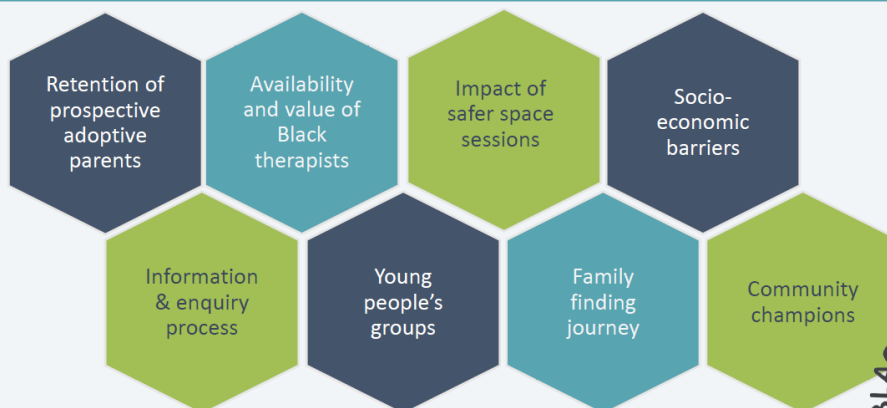
Safe Space session attendee

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Black Adoption Project

Pilot & research plan



 **LAURELLE BROWN**
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY



Black Adoption Project

Next steps

- **Potential visit from Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children & Families, in October**
- **Article in Children & Young People Now in October** (Community Care article in May linked below)
- **Increased dissemination of BAP newsletter so more borough staff are aware**
- **Looking at future funding** – further Adoption England funding uncertain until Gov spending review

Adoption leaders bid to reform 'institutionally racist' system

Strategy aims to address significant delays for black children awaiting adoption, including by tackling 'multiple hurdles' facing black people wanting to adopt and lack of diversity among adoption workforce

by Mithran Samuel on May 30, 2024 in Children, Social work leaders, Workforce

 **LAURELLE BROWN**
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY



13.0 Adopt London Projects funded by Adoption England, DfE grant funding

13.1 Early Permanence

- Conference held 3/7/24 attended by Family Court Judges, Cafcass, IROs and LA Heads of Service
- Shared SW training programme delivered in various sites across London, further sessions in Autumn, including Brent.

13.2 Matching

- Adopt London Manager now part time role, Darla Steward ALW, project has been refreshed and new priorities set with Team Managers
- The addition of a Clinical Psychologist to the project has enabled more capacity to support Child Appreciation Days, attend and support Children's Activity Days to advise prospective adopters and lead on other trauma informed practice across the project.
- One of the themes emerging from the project is the needs of neurodivergent children in transitions. The psychologist has experience and expertise in this area and is working with Professor Beth Neil, University of East Anglia to develop practice guidance to support these children as they move to new families.

13.3 London Commissioning

- Funding allocated to undertake regional needs assessment, this was completed at the end of June (Commissioning lead from Achieving for Children) analysis of ASGSF spend and therapies used, focus groups with adopters and social workers.
- A successful innovation bid was submitted for £190k of funding to create a shared Adoption Support Service Manager role to develop a social work practice model across Adopt London. Also, the allocated funding will enable additional Clinical Psychology resource to further develop business case & funding model for in house psychology provision in all Adopt London regions.

14.0 Conversations for Change

An Adopt London, adopter consultation project was launched earlier in the summer with an adopter with experience of community engagement facilitating the consultation.

Over 100 responses were received, feedback from families aligned with messages heard in the focus groups that were held as part of the regional needs assessment. The plan is to continue the consultation project, including some at least one face to face focus group each year.



15.0 Adopt London West practice updates

15.1 Drama workshop

ALW's third drama workshop for young people took place in April, 3 young people from Brent attended, 2 adopted children and 1 child living in a special guardianship arrangement. The children attended every day, none knew each other beforehand, they all engaged in the workshop and enjoyed a celebration event on the last day, attended by their parents/carers.

One of the same children went on to attend a Free to Be, a residential summer camp, below is some feedback from the camp organisers on her participation.

What a pleasure it was to have K! She is such a sweet, caring and thoughtful young person. She was so excited when she arrived, bracing herself for all the outdoor activities, in particular she LOVED horse riding. K was really able to spread her wings on this project. It was amazing seeing her confidence grow each day. She gained lots of new skills such as going canoeing and practicing her swimming. It was amazing seeing her come back from a night of camping under the stars, which we know must have been a little nerve racking. It's clear that she benefits from the 1:1 approach we take, spending time in the outdoors and adventure.

15.2 Keeping in Touch arrangements

A focus of work in this period has been to further develop the keeping in touch arrangements for children, previously referred to as Contact. In line with the adoption transformation agenda,

As a result of this focus and reorganisation of resources there has been a significant increase in direct contact cases, focussed work to promote maintaining relationships for children has resulted in an increase from 56 open direct contact arrangements on 31/3/23 to 164 arrangements on 31/7/24, an increase of 192%

In addition to the regular cases, the team is currently supporting 7 Brent families where *additional* keeping in touch arrangements have been made with birth family members, beyond what was originally planned, which involves 17 children in total seeing/communicating with family members where they may not have done previously.

16.0 Feedback

A sample of feedback received following the drama group in April 2024:

"I wanted to reach out and say a huge thank you to Suzanne, you and the team that facilitated last week's drama workshop. R, as you know, was reticent to join and yet he now has a new 'best friend' and appears far more confident and relaxed!"

He also felt able to disclose an incident of bullying that has been worrying and affecting him at school. I believe this is directly related to the level of trust, acceptance and empowerment he felt, and as the week progressed, he grew in confidence enough to be able to recognise and speak out about the hurt he has been experiencing. Thank you for inviting R to join the workshop and for providing him with an incredible experience and supportive environment, showing him, he can be who he is, and be proud of that ♥ this is such a fun community"

- *"I was so nervous at first but now I like it here"*
- *"We are all on the same page"*
- *"It is really special being here"*
- *"It is nice to feel like you are not alone"*

"The amazing work you have done with the children is greatly appreciated."

17.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

17.1 There are currently no stakeholder and ward member consultation considerations arising from this report.

18.0 Financial Considerations

18.1 Brent Council's contribution to the cost of running the functions of ALW in 2023/24 was £0.411m.

18.2 The overall benefits of a shared service are also realised through the practice improvement and opportunities that are possible now that small individual services have become part of the wider Adopt London collaboration and the national RAA network. It was previously not possible for LA Adoption services

to offer the range of support and services that can now be delivered as a Regional Adoption Agency.

19.0 Legal Considerations

19.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

20.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

20.1 There are currently no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

21.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

21.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

22.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

22.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

23.0 Communication Considerations


23.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 14 October 2024</p>
	<p>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</p>
	<p>Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2023/24</p>	

Wards Affected:	N/A
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
<p>Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small></p>	<p>Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.</p>
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
<p>Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small></p>	<p>Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Sonya Kalyniak Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Sonya.Kalyniak@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Sabine Kadhaya Interim Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing Sabine.Kadhaya@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Annual IRO Report is prepared by the Safeguarding and Reviewing service in accordance with the statutory requirements to inform the Corporate Parenting Committee and senior leaders regarding the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assuring and improvement of services for Looked After Children (LAC).

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to note the contents of the report including priorities for 2024/25 (see section 3.47).

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

The IRO Service contributes to the Brent Borough Plan under the following priorities:

- The best start in life
- A healthier Brent
- Prosperity and stability

3.2 Background

3.3 The IRO function sits within the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service. This service consists of:

- A Service Manager
- Two full time IROs and 12 IROs commissioned via Aidhour, an independent agency
- Five Child Protection Advisors
- One LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer)
- One Contextual Safeguarding Lead.

3.4 Aidhour has been commissioned to provide IROs for Brent for the past 25 years, with the current contract coming to an end on 30 September 2024. Historically, the high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input for many of our Looked After Children. Aidhour are now experiencing recruitment and retention issues. As there has been an increased IRO staff changes within Aidhour combined with an increased cost, funding has been identified to establish a further two in-house IRO posts. In 2024/25, two in-house IROs will be appointed to bring more consistency in IRO and practice for looked after children and reduce Aidhour cost. There is currently an evaluation of a tender to appoint a new and revised contract from 1 October 2024 for additional IRO support.

3.5 All Aidhour IROs are experienced qualified social workers who are Disclosure and Barring Service checked and registered with Social Work England. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life. There are currently 14 IROs in Brent, including two permanent IROs, with representation of male and female IROs (6 males and 8 females). The ethnicity of the IROs is partially reflective of the diverse population of Brent's Looked After Children (LAC).

Table 1: IRO Ethnicity

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White British	7
White Other	1
Black or Black British	4
Asian or Asian British	2

3.6 Legal context and purpose of the service

3.7 The Independent Reviewing Service has been a statutory requirement since 2004. In 2010 the government published the 'Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook', which is statutory guidance for IROs and local authorities. This was implemented in April 2011 and was linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2010). The responsibilities of the IRO were broadened to include not only the management of the review process but a wider overview of the case, including regular monitoring and follow up between reviews. The statutory duties of the IRO [section 25B (1), 1989 Act] are to:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- participate in any review of the child's case;
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.

3.8 The core tasks of the IRO include:

- Ensuring the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child. As corporate parents, each local authority should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.
- Monitoring the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. This includes identifying patterns of concern. Where IROs identify more general concerns around the quality of the authority's services to its Looked After Children, the IRO should alert senior managers. Equally important, the IRO should recognise and report on good practice.

3.9 Update on priorities for 2023/24

3.10 Improve the attendance of children and young people in care at their reviews in 2023/24.

Complete and ongoing. The attendance of looked after children, above the age of four years, at their reviews has increased to 76% for 2023/2024 compared to 73% in 2022/23. Direct participation in LAC Reviews is a standing agenda item at

the bi-monthly IRO meetings to develop more creative ways for children to participate in their reviews. This includes having more activity-based reviews with a clear child focused agenda. An IRO engagement handbook has been created and shared with IROs. There are many good practice examples of IROs engaging with children in a child focussed way. For example, one IRO had a conversation over a game of chess before a review and another IRO went for a bike ride with an autistic child. Tools being used include a “tree of life exercise” or other activities that help the IRO understand the child’s world and their lived experience.

3.11 The quality of information provided to children and young people following their reviews will be improved to ensure these are consistently written in age appropriate and child friendly language.

Complete and ongoing. Dip sampling has taken place of looked after children review letters and has shown that there is an improvement in how the letters are written in more child friendly/developmentally appropriate ways. Individual feedback has been provided to all IROs, highlighting the use of complex terms/language. Activities are taking place at the IRO meetings to consider the more simplistic use of language in discussion with children. Additionally, best practice examples and re-phrased summaries have been shared with all IROs to further improve the language used.

3.12 The quality assurance and performance reporting around mid-way reviews and participation will be strengthened. The midway review format has been changed to improve qualitative information and performance team have devised a reporting structure for management to review and track progress.

Complete and ongoing. Monthly data is reviewed by the Service Manager and shared with Aidhour to monitor the IRO footprint on case records. The recording of midway reviews is carefully monitored by the Service Manager and Aidhour, which has led to an improvement of midway reviews being recorded. The performance data for the permanent IROs is further explored in their individual supervision, therefore providing further scrutiny.

3.13 There will be increased supervision of commissioned IROs provided by Aidhour to help maintain consistency and maintain a qualitative service to Looked After Children and Young People.

Complete. Aidhour managers have been actively involved in service development work with a greater overview of the work the IRO associates are carrying out. Regular IRO meetings focus on the quality of work and setting expectations by providing best practice examples. Regular dip sampling is used to ensure that there is a more standardised way of capturing the minutes of LAC reviews.

Anonymised case study: excerpts of minutes of a LAC Review

Dear Alise

It was lovely to meet you for the first time at your aunt's home.

I am writing the minutes of your looked after child review in a letter to you, so that you can have a record of what we talked about.

Your social worker explained that you were placed with your aunt under Section 20 of the Children Act, 1989. This is an agreement with your mother for you to live away from home with family until your social worker is able to complete assessments of your mum and dad. Your social worker is worried that your parents are struggling to meet your needs and keep you safe.

Your social worker explained that the plan is for you to stay with your aunt for now until all the assessments are complete.

When I asked you how you felt about the plan, you shrugged. Thank you for showing me all your pictures and colour books. You did get a bit upset when we spoke about your mum.

Your aunt is happy to look after you. She said that it's been quite difficult for you to be away from mum which is perfectly understandable.

I agree that you are best placed with your aunt until all the assessments are completed.

I made some recommendations that needs to be followed up and these will be reviewed at your next review.

It is important that you know who to contact if you are not happy with anything or want to make a complaint about any aspects of your care. Here is how you can contact me.

3.14 Profile of Looked after Children

- 3.15 As of 31 March 2024 Brent had 307 children in care compared to 319 children on 31 March 2023, a decrease of 3.8%. This represents 42 children in care per 10,000 children compared to the England rate of 71 per 10,000 head of the child population, a decrease in rate by 2 from the previous year (44). A full profile of Looked After Children was presented to the Corporate Parenting

Committee in July 2024 in the LAC Annual report. This includes including numbers, gender, age, ethnicity, legal status and placement type. This report is available here:

<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s143530/8.%20Annual%20Corporate%20Parenting%20Report%202023-24.pdf>

3.16 Quality assurance and monitoring

3.17 Caseloads for full-time IROs are between 60 and 65 children in accordance with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations. Social work staff value the expertise and knowledge of IROs, who provide guidance on care planning. IROs complete midway reviews and liaise with the child's Guardian where appropriate in court proceedings, as well as with other professionals as and when required.

3.18 The Safeguarding and Reviewing Service Manager oversees the work of Aidhour IROs through practice development meetings, quarterly contract monitoring meetings, reviewing of LAC performance data and audits. Group practice development meetings take place once every two months and contract meetings take place once a quarter. These meetings are also used as a forum of communication for IROs to raise any issues they may have with senior leaders. Invitations for internal staff and external professionals include:

- The Corporate Director of Children and Young People
- The Head of LAC and Permanency
- The Head of the Virtual School
- Service managers in LAC and Permanency, including those responsible for Leaving Care, Fostering and Adoption and the Service Manager for Children with Disabilities
- Brent YOS
- Brent CYP Commissioning and Resources Team
- The London wide Rescue and Response Service
- Barnardo's
- The Team Manager of the Performance Team
- Multi Agency partners
- CAFCASS.

3.19 IROs ensure monitoring and scrutiny outside the statutory LAC reviews, via Quality Assurance activity such as midway reviews, escalations and consultations with social work teams. Dip sampling has shown that some IROs leave a strong footprint on the children's case files, ensuring that they have a clear overview of the child's care plan and journey; however, quality assurance work demonstrates that the IRO footprint needs to be strengthened for consistency across all children in care. IROs also work closely with Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) when there might be a period of dual registration when LAC and child protection processes might run concurrently for short periods of time. CPAs attending LAC reviews prior to ending child protection plans will ensure that all of the children's needs are fully met via their care plan.

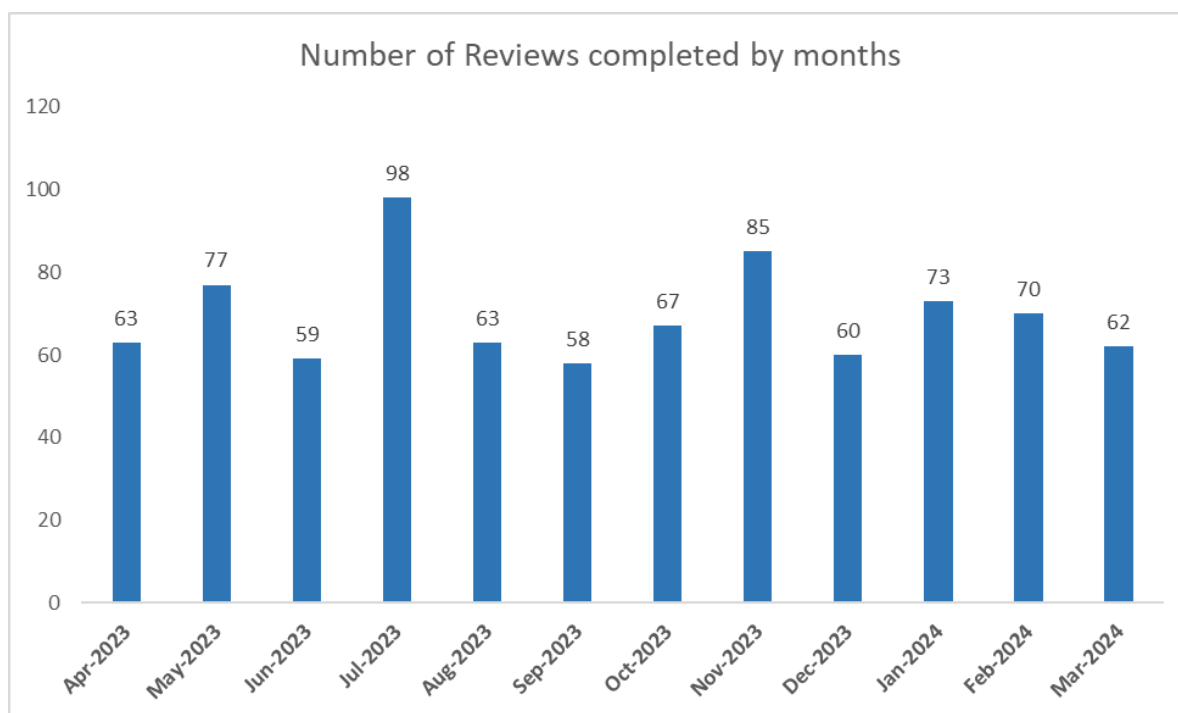
3.20 The annual meeting between the Corporate Director, Children and Young People and IROs took place on 4 March 2024, when the department's strategic priorities were discussed. Additionally, IROs were updated about semi-independent inspection processes starting in autumn 2024 and that a 4-bed Children's Home in Wembley has been purchased.

3.21 Performance of the IRO service

3.22 The following information provides a summary of performance in 2023/24:

- 835 LAC Reviews took place for 458 children, 28 reviews fewer than in 2022-2023 (863 reviews).
- A total of 83% of reviews happened within statutory timescale. This is higher than in 2022/23 (82%) and a continuing focus of monitoring and challenge. This is an area of improvement focus for 2024/25.
- On average there were 70 reviews chaired each month with peaks of 98 in July 2023 and 85 in November 2023. Less busy months were June and September 2023.

Table 6: Number of reviews per month



3.23 Attendance and participation of children

3.24 Continuing work is focusing on how LAC reviews can encourage greater participation of children of all ages. LAC reviews enable children to have their voice heard and choose who they would like to attend the meeting. Children are encouraged to set their own agenda and when possible lead their own review meetings. Creative resources have been shared with the IROs and two sessions about how meetings can be less adult led, have taken place. A dip

sample audit has shown that children attend the majority of their reviews in person or if this is not possible the IROs will make every attempt to gather the children's views prior to the meeting. However, at times it is not possible for children to attend as they might have additional needs, or they might choose not to attend the meeting.

3.25 Children are able to participate in their reviews in a number of ways (please see the participation types in table 7 below). The majority of children and young people aged over four years (528 or 76%) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is an increase from 73% in the previous year. As noted in the Ofsted ILAC inspection, the direct participation of children and young people in their reviews is an ongoing focus and is being addressed via various measures as mentioned above.

Table 7: Participation types

Participation Types	Description of codes	Number of children	% of children
PN0	Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	142	17%
PN1	Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself (Attendance).	528	63%
PN2	Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf.	5	1%
PN3	Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) (Attendance symbols)	4	0%
PN4	Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself	4	0%
PN5	Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her (Views represented by advocate or independent reviewing officer (IRO) through texting)	104	12%
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium (Texting the chair)	41	5%
PN7	Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	7	1%
Grand Total		835	100%

3.26 Advocacy

3.27 Advocacy is an important part of empowering Looked After Children and Young People. Brent has commissioned Coram Voice since 2021 to provide advocacy and a befriending service to Looked After Children and Care Leavers. A dip sample audit confirmed that Coram Voice is mentioned at all LAC review meetings and how children and young people can access the service. In total children and young people have raised 275 advocacy issues with Coram Voice in 2023/24. The main requests related to the following:

- Concerns about SW / PA (28)
- Complaint (26)
- Support at meetings (24)
- Housing (23)
- Education, Training & Employment (18)
- Request to move placement - other (8)
- Request to move placement - to move to more independent living (8)

3.28 Coram Voice are contracted to deliver 500 advocacy hours per year for a target of 60 children and young people in Brent, which varies based on the individual need. Coram Voice continue to exceed the contracted hours. The current service specification allows for an average of 5 to 8.33 hours of advocacy work for each child or young person's case. In 2023/24 Coram Voice provided 879 hours of advocacy support to 89 children and young people (57 issues-based advocacy and 32 child protection advocacy). This led to a budget pressure in the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service.

3.29 Quality of Care Planning and progress between reviews

3.30 The IROs' main responsibility is to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy of their care plans.

3.31 The role of the IROs is to monitor progress on permanency and care plans through a mid-way review conducted by meeting with the social worker. This is either by a Teams call or in-person meeting. All Looked After Children receive a child friendly leaflet entitled 'My Independent Reviewing Officer' at their initial review. The leaflet contains their IRO's name, contact number and email address. Children often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them.

3.32 IROs also ensure young people have a Pathway Plan. They will ensure it is provided in a timely way and will escalate concerns if this is not in place. This includes promotion of Housing Vulnerability reports and encouraging an exploration of Staying Put arrangements. When children subject of a Child Protection Plan become looked after, IROs work closely with Child Protection Advisors to bring forward the Child Protection Conference and avoid dual plans.

3.33 Escalations and Practice Alerts

- 3.34 One of the key functions of the statutory role of the IRO is to seek resolution to any problem or professional disagreement arising out the care planning process. It is a core part of their role to scrutinise practice and challenge the Local Authority and hold them to account in relation to achieving good and timely outcomes for children. To do this, IROs must establish good working relationships with social workers and their managers in order to be able to enable a good dispute resolution process and with good support of this process by senior managers. Alongside this responsibility, IROs in Brent also have a role in identifying good practice so learning from what works well for children and young people can also be understood and replicated.
- 3.35 The IRO Handbook, legislation and guidance around the planning for Cared for Children requires Local Authorities to ensure they have a good Formal Dispute Resolution in place. Whilst this may look different in each local authority all systems must have a 20-day maximum time limit to resolve any disagreement from the beginning of the process to its conclusion. In Brent this commences with an Informal Practice Alert being raised by the IRO with resolution at this level within 5 working days with the Team Manager. If this is not achieved, then the IRO will escalate to a formal alert allowing a further 10 days to reach resolution with a Senior Manager. If there were still no agreement after 15 days, then the IRO may escalate concern to CAFCASS. The escalation policy has now been updated to simplify the escalation process.
- 3.36 In 2023/24 IROs raised 34 escalations, compared to 51 in the previous year. The following main concerns were raised:
- The lack of an available care/pathway plan at the time of the review meeting
 - Placement Planning Meetings/Personal Education Plans/LAC Health Assessment meetings being out of timescales
 - Social Worker conduct during the meeting
 - Delay in referrals/actions from the LAC review meeting
 - Case recording issues
 - The lack of response from Social Work teams.
- 3.37 When concerns are raised by IROs, these concerns are generally responded to in a timely way. However, some concerns need to be tracked and escalated by the Service Manager. The escalation process provides an avenue to resolving issues in the vast majority of cases. In some instances differences of opinion are acknowledged. Senior management oversight ensures clear Local Authority decision making in the best interests of the child. There have been no escalations to the Director, Early Help and Social Care or the Corporate Director and no escalations to CAFCASS. In order to ensure that escalations are monitored and responded to in a timely way, the Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing has introduced an additional layer of scrutiny to monitoring escalations.

3.38 Priorities for 2024/2025

Priorities to improve the IRO service for 2024/25 are as follows:

- Recruit to two new in-house IRO posts to build consistency for children and reduce Aidhour cost
- Implement a new contract with a commissioned provider by 1 October 2024
- Continue to improve timeliness of LAC reviews taking place within statutory timescales by working with teams to ensure referrals are received on time and closer scrutiny of performance data
- Continue to increase the direct participation of children and young people at their LAC reviews to 80% through more creative ways of working to encourage child/young people led meetings.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Looked after children, their family and carers are routinely consulted as part of LAC Review processes. Care experienced young people support with the recruitment of IROs.

4.2 Children and young people provide feedback through discussions with their social worker, IRO, or their carers SSW, Looked After Children Reviews, written feedback for Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, Care in Action/Participation activities and Brent Care Journeys.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are currently no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations are within the body of this report.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.


10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 14 October 2024
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report: 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024	
Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail, Director Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. It includes relevant data on the service's performance and activities, as well as updates on the functioning and progress of the Fostering Panel. Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming period. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering

National Minimum Standards (2011).

- 1.2 Brent Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000. This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 1 April 2024 to the 30 September 2024.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for Brent Looked After Children.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 This report sets out the management of the local authority's inhouse fostering service and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of the fostering service contributes to the following borough priorities:

- **The Best Start in Life**
- **Prosperity and Stability**
- **A Healthier Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**

In order for care experienced young people to have the best start in life, prosperity and stability, safety, and good health they need safe, stable homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs. The fostering service contributes to these priorities by recruiting, assessing, and supporting foster carers and connected person carers for Brent children and young people. Providing safe, stable, loving placements for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

4.0 Background

4.1 Service Priorities

- 4.1.1 The in-house fostering function is located within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACP) of the Children and Young People's Department. Service priorities for 2024/25 are:

- To have a strong and renewed focus on recruitment, assessment and

approval of new foster carers with the view to achieve a net gain of **10** new carers by the end of the financial year.

- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, by rolling out the new fostering offer and deliver existing and new therapeutic support to increase placement stability and develop carers' ability and resilience in managing more complex and challenging placements.
- To implement the first Mockingbird constellation in Brent.
- To improve the outcomes for the looked after children by providing local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements and keeping children connected to their networks.
- To promote and improve the take up of learning opportunities for new and experienced foster carers and connected persons using different delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online/virtual and E-Learning.
- To consolidate and strengthen the partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers by working collaboratively with neighbouring local authorities to implement the West London Recruitment Hub.
- To recruit, train and retain foster carers that can offer emergency placements to children and young people who come into care in unplanned circumstances.
- To continue to develop and transform the service in consultation and collaboration with care experienced young people and foster carers through regular feedback and co-designed training and steering groups.
- To ensure that the foster carers feel supported and valued by providing regular service updates, promoting a sense of belonging to a wider fostering community and celebrating the carers achievements and commitment to their role.

Progress on these priorities will be explored throughout this report.

4.2 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.2.1 The structure of the Fostering Service remains the same since the last report. The Fostering Service consists of two teams: one Recruitment, Support and Assessment Team, and one Kinship Care Team. The service is overseen by a Service Manager, however this post is currently vacant with recruitment in progress.
- 4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 8 supervising social workers, one Team Manager, and one part-time Recruitment Officer (RO) post.
- 4.2.3 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers, one Team Manager and one Practice Consultant Social Worker.
- 4.2.4 The workload in the fostering team continues to be at manageable levels, whilst the Kinship Team has experienced an increased number of cases over the reporting year as new kinship carers are assessed, approved and allocated to supervising social workers for ongoing support. Kinship care

can offer children the stability and love they need where there is family breakdown through the continuation of existing relationships with extended family members or friends, which we continue to prioritise where safe and appropriate.

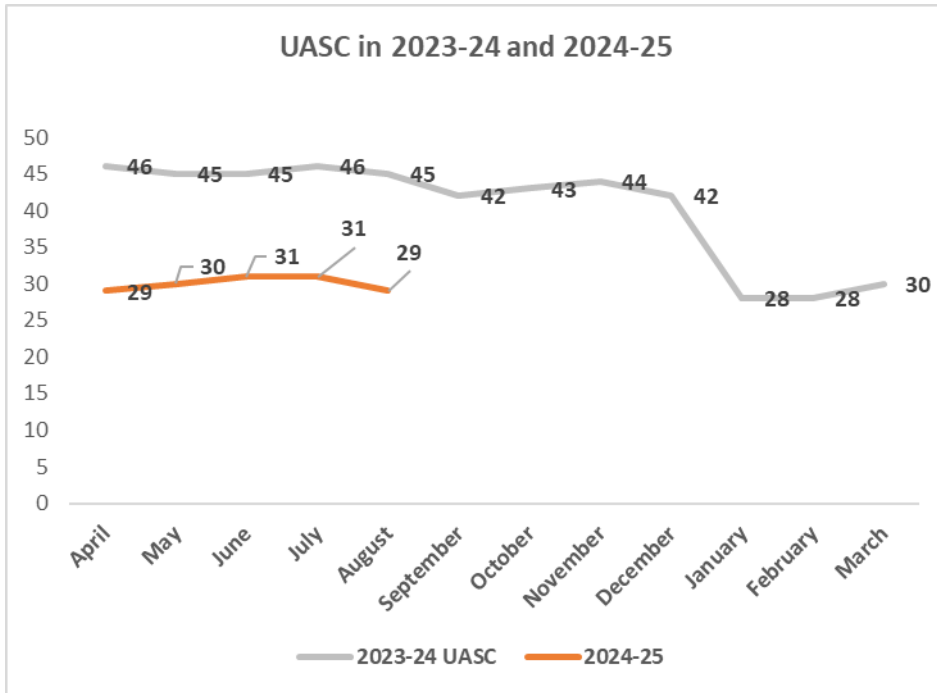
4.3 Placement Activity

4.3.1 The total number of looked after children as of 31 August 2024 was 295, which is a decrease by 12 children from 31 Mar-2024 (307).

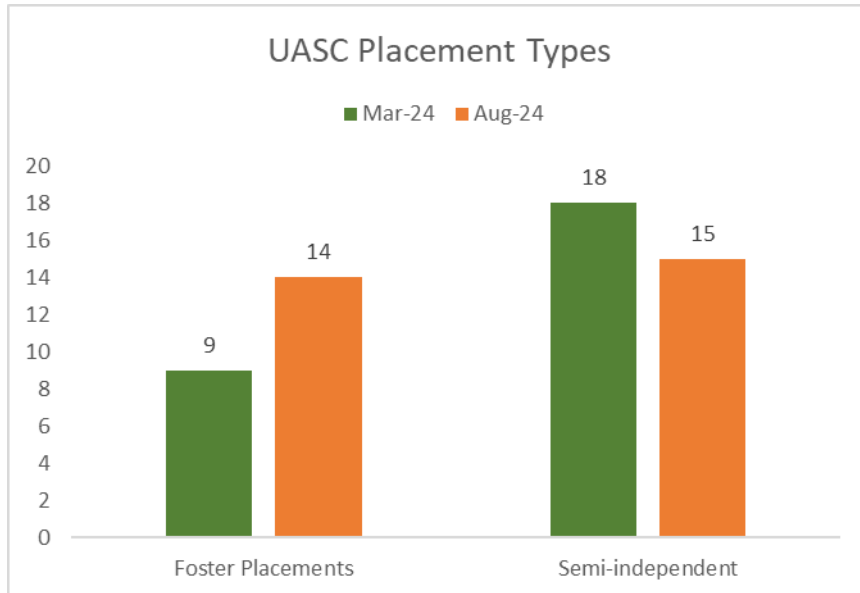
4.3.2 The corporate performance targets for 2024/2025 are as follows:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 31st Aug-2024 was 16% (48 children), same as Mar-24, 16% (49 children) – below the annual target of 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as of the 31st Aug -2024 was 15% (43 children), a decrease by 2% from 31st Mar-2024 (17%, 52 children) – below the annual target of 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as of 31st Aug -2024 was 30% (89 children), a decrease by 2% from 31st of Mar -2024 (32%, 99 children) —above the annual target of 25%
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as of 31st Aug -2024 was 61% (180 children), a decrease of 4% from 31st of Mar- 2024 which was 65% (200 children) – below the annual target of 70%. This is primarily related to the age of new looked after children and the increase in the number of 16 - 17 year-old UASC who were placed in semi-independent accommodation
- There were 44 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as of 31st Aug-2024, which represents 15% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 5.6% from 31st Mar-24 (9.4%, 29 children).

4.3.4 There were 29 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as of 31st Aug-2024, an increase of 2 UASC (27 UASC as at Mar-2024).



4.3.5 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation as of 31st Aug-2024 was 15 compared to 18 UASC as at Mar-2024, none in residential children’s home and 14 UASC placed in foster placements, compared to 9 UASC as at Mar-2024.



4.4 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

Recruitment

4.4.1 During this reporting period, the monthly information evenings were held on Zoom, and the team attended both face-to-face and online recruitment events

targeted at communities in various parts of the borough. The recruitment activity continues to have a broad focus, so as to capture as much interest as possible.

4.4.2 Outreach Work: The Fostering team continued its outreach efforts during this reporting period by attending several key community events. In July, the team participated in the London Jobs Fair, where they had the opportunity to engage with local job seekers and promote fostering as a meaningful and fulfilling alternative career path. The team also attended a community event at Unity Church, where they met with local residents and faith groups to raise awareness about fostering within these communities. In September, the team was present at the Queens Park Day Festival, which was well-attended. This event provided another valuable opportunity to engage with local residents and highlight the benefits of fostering, further expanding the service's outreach and recruitment efforts.

4.4.3 Launch of New Fostering Offer: During this reporting period, the Fostering Service launched its new fostering offer with a special event in May. The launch provided a great opportunity to effectively communicate the new offer to foster carers, staff, and wider public in person. Feedback indicated that the event was well received, with carers appreciating the clarity of the new offer and the chance to engage directly with the team.

The new fostering offer includes:

- Increased fostering allowances
- A free laptop or tablet via the Brent Digital Offer
- Blue Light card-discounts from local and national retailers
- £1000 referral reward for existing foster carers who refer a friend or family member who become a Brent foster carer
- Dedicated one-to-one support from an experienced social worker
- 24/7 telephone support
- Fostering Network membership
- Annual social and celebration events for carers
- Monthly support groups
- Access to free therapeutic support and training
- Potential to be part of our first Mockingbird constellation

4.4.4 West London Fostering Hub: The Hub went "live" on the 13 May 2024.

All fostering enquiries are being routed to the Hammersmith and Fulham hosted WL Hub from our phone lines and website.

A foster carer has been recruited to the Hub Team as an enquiry officer and fostering ambassador. Feedback from enquirers has been very positive so far and we will be growing the "buddy" support element across the region moving forward for those people within the assessment process.

Support Groups for those in assessment start this month. These will focus on themes i.e. taking your first placement, managing finances and Training and Development Standards....

Fostering teams across the partnership are finalising joint Application and Initial Home Visit templates to further streamline practice.

Headline enquiry data from the first 4 months suggests that we are seeing a positive trajectory in relation to increased initial enquiries and contacts.

- The distribution of initial enquiries is relatively even across the LAs (on average between 10-14%).
- Brent's current conversion rate from initial contact to initial enquiry is 17%. The average conversion rates for initial contacts across the region is 22% with some LAs receiving a higher conversion rate. Hillingdon and Harrow are the outliers, having a higher conversion rate from initial contacts. Hillingdon's enquiry source is primarily through print media with Harrow's being mainly through events or google searches. Any patterns seen in success of different types of activity/messaging from the digital campaign are being shared through the CAN dashboard, and comms leads are meeting regularly to provide a reflective space to share what they are seeing work from continued local activity to provide learning to inform local comms and marketing for future activity across the region.
- At the end of August 2024 there were 28 people who are interested in fostering with Brent whom the Hub were in the process of contacting

Due to the time limited DfE funding for the WL Hub, we have agreed a 6-month extension to the project to September 2025 in order to fully test and evidence the impact of the Hub.

Assessments

- 4.4.5 In the reporting period, the fostering team received **28** enquiries. **14** progressed to an Initial Visit, **13** have been completed and 1 is outstanding. Of the 13 completed Initial Visits, 6 withdrew their interest, 2 were NFA, 2 are on hold(to be revisited) and **3** have progressed to stage 1 of the assessment process.
- 4.4.6 Of the 5 assessments in Stage 2 reported in the last 6 months, 2 applicants were approved in May and September 2024. 1 applicant is on hold, and 2 assessments have been terminated. Of the 2 terminated assessments, 1 was not happy with the fostering allowance rate and decided to apply to another local authority and the other due to a change of circumstances which raised health and safety concerns in the home. The two newly approved foster carers in the reporting period are between the ages of 50 and 55, one is Black British heritage and the other White European heritage.
- 4.4.7 Of the 5 assessments in Stage 1 reported in the last 6 months, 1 has progressed to stage 2, 1 remains in stage 1 due to delays in receiving the

outcome of DBS and Medical checks and 3 have pulled out. Reasons for not continuing with the assessment are; ill health, new job and unplanned pregnancy.

4.4.8 Therefore as of the 30 September, there are:

- 2 assessments in Stage 2
- 4 assessments in Stage 1
- 3 applicants to progress to Stage 1 on receipt of fully completed consent forms
- 1 applicant under further exploration

4.4.9 In this reporting period we have seen 5 mainstream foster carers resign. Exit interviews with these carers show the following reasons for ceasing to foster with Brent:

- expecting baby, no room for fostering
- retiring to care for grandchildren
- resigned due to birth children's needs
- following challenging placements, return to work full time (x2)

Therefore, we have a net increase of -3 mainstream foster carers so far this reporting year, given 2 new approvals and 5 resignations.

4.5 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW) and the fostering service

4.5.1 The retention of foster carers is and has been one of the Fostering Service's main priorities. The foster carers continue to report positive relationships with their supervising social workers and the feedback received during their annual reviews and attendance to panel, has highlighted the importance of the support received from the highly skilled and experienced supervising social workers. The quality of the relationship they have with the social workers has been cited as the main reason for their commitment to Brent and this continues to be the case. The foster carers report being able to contact their supervising social worker when in need and receiving appropriate level of support and guidance during difficult periods.

4.5.2 The fostering team works closely and in partnership with the Children's teams (Localities and Care Planning teams) to ensure that the care plans are progressed without delay and the children's needs are met whilst receiving the best care. The supervising social workers (team managers when needed) attend placement planning and permanency planning meetings, looked after children's reviews and all other relevant statutory and non-statutory meetings, supporting their foster carers to build positive relationships with the 'team around the child'.

4.5.3 Placement stability is an important factor in offering an effective fostering service and is crucial to ensuring that Brent delivers good outcomes for each child in care. Placement stability meetings are now embedded in practice with children's social workers making a referral for stability meetings in a timely way. Over recent years, there has been considerable focus on supporting

foster carers to maintain placements. With the launch of the West London Fostering Hub, our joint West London fostering front door, and an overall improved core offer for foster carers, it remains a necessary and priority task to ensure that foster carers and their families feel supported in their valuable role.

- 4.5.4 In addition to the support the carers received from social workers, the foster carers attend monthly support groups organised and facilitated by the Fostering Service. This is an informal and relaxed event where foster carers new and more established are able to meet and get to know each other. This works well to provide support to newly approved carers. The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as this remains the foster carers' preferred option.
- 4.5.5 As part of our commitment to engaging with foster carers and improving the service, we have continued with Foster Care Reference Group feedback sessions rebranded as "Coffee with Kelli." These informal gatherings provide foster carers with a valuable opportunity to discuss their experiences, share feedback, and offer recommendations directly to the Head of Service. Two of these sessions were held during this reporting period, and the response from carers has been very positive. The events have fostered open and engaging discussions, with carers appreciating the chance to voice their thoughts in a supportive and relaxed environment over tea and coffee.
- 4.5.6 The fostering service with the support of the Brent Communication team keep foster carers engaged and informed by providing a monthly newsletter and the carers also receive a quarterly letter directly from the Head of Service.
- 4.5.7 Fostering Walk: As part of Fostering Week in May, the service held a Fostering Walk and Picnic on the 13th of May. The event had a strong turnout, and the feedback received from foster carers was overwhelmingly positive. The walk aimed to foster relationships between carers, providing them with an informal opportunity to connect as well as raising awareness of fostering for Brent in the community. It also allowed Supervising Social Workers (SSWs) to engage with foster carers in a relaxed setting, further strengthening these key professional relationships. This event was highly valued by both carers and staff, reinforcing the importance of such gatherings for community building within the Brent fostering community.



Brent Fostering Walk
and Picnic
13 May 2024

4.5.8 Seaside Trip: The Fostering team organised a seaside trip for Brent foster carers and young people, which saw a fantastic turnout with 72 attendees. The event was highly appreciated by both carers and young people, offering a welcome break from daily routines. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing their gratitude for the opportunity to come together and enjoy the day as a fostering community.



4.5.9 End of Year Celebration: Organising our end-of-year celebration for all Brent foster carers is underway. This special occasion is to recognise and celebrate our foster carers invaluable contributions to Brent children throughout the year. We are looking forward to honouring the dedication and hard work of our fostering community at this event.

4.6 The Kinship Care Team

- 4.6.1 The Kinship Care team undertakes both planned and emergency assessments of prospective family members and friends who come forward as alternative carers when it is not possible for a child to remain in the care of their parents. The team provides placement support to the connected persons carers and training during the assessment period.
- 4.6.2 In the period from April to September 2024 (15th Sept), Kinship Care team received 54 referrals for viability assessments of a relative, friend and people connected to the child. In the period from October 2023 to March 2024, Kinship Care team received 74 referrals. Kinship referrals do fluctuate month to month and are demand led.
- 4.6.3 In this reporting period, following a positive viability assessment, 27 Connected Persons assessments were allocated to social workers. 4 of these assessments did not progress as carers withdrew or did not wish to be assessed further.
- 4.6.4 12 children were placed in 10 new Reg 24/ Connected Persons placements between April 2024 to Sept 2024.
- 4.6.5 Children who remain in kinship placements beyond 24 weeks where the carer has not been approved as a Connected Persons carer (following presentation and recommended for approval at the Fostering Panel) are considered to be in unregulated placements. As at the end of September, there were 12 children in 8 unregulated placements of which 3 have been to panel and the average time over 24 weeks is approximately 10 weeks.

A risk assessment has been completed for each of these placements which has been signed by Head of Service and there continues to be close monitoring of these placements by visiting the placements weekly until the carers assessment is presented at the Fostering Panel and the approval is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service. The reasons for delay in presenting to panel primarily are in relation to delayed DBS and medical checks.

- 4.6.6 9 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Fostering panel between April and Sept 2024.
- 4.6.7 7 children were made subjects to Special Guardianship Orders in this reporting period. 6 were granted at the conclusion of public care proceedings and 1 was granted as a result of a private application.
- 4.6.8 Kinship Care Week 2024 will take place from 07 to 13 October 2024. The following activities and events will take place:
- Library display in the Civic Centre between the 07 to 13 October 2023 about Kinship Care through time as reflected in literature. Banners will

be placed in the foyer promoting the Kinship Care week and leaflets will be distributed to raise awareness of Kinship care.

- A 'Coffee Morning' on the 10 October 2024 to celebrate the achievements of our Special Guardians and Kinship carers. This event will include some short presentations from kinship care experienced people, a video produced by 'Kinship,' and an opportunity for our Special Guardians to meet colleagues from Early Help teams, Brent Health Matters, Brent Community Engagement team, Virtual School and Adopt London West.

4.7 Fostering Panel

4.7.1 The Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair is an independent person with professional and personal experience of fostering. Most of the independent panel members have personal experience of the fostering system, including one independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship arrangement. The work of the Fostering Panel is supported by the Panel Adviser.

4.7.2 No new Panel members has been recruited in the last 6 months. Unfortunately, our Panel Chair has given notice after 10+ years of chairing Brent's Fostering Panel. We note, with thanks, the contribution that Karen Rogers has made over these years and wish her well in retirement. Recruitment for a new panel chair will commence this month.

4.7.3 Fostering Panels are generally held three times every two months and extra panels are arranged if there is an increase in demand. Most panels take place virtually; and face to face when the number of cases presented is high.

4.7.4 The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:

- Each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer or Connected Person(s) foster carer and the terms of their approval.
- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer.
- The long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.

4.7.5 During this period April to October 2024: 9 panels were held with 34 cases presented of which:

- 9 were recommended for approval as short term connected persons
- 2 were recommended for approval as short term carer
- 16 carers were re-approved as part of their annual review cycle
- 2 Serious Concern reviews
- 3 carers whose fostering approval/status were terminated/resigned

- 1 carer was re-approved as long term carer
- 1 case presented for update

4.7.6 All the recommendations made by the panel were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

4.7.7 The Head of Service for Looked after Children and Permanency acts as the ADM for the Fostering Service. The ADM, upon reviewing the recommendation of the Fostering Panel, decides whether applicants should be approved as foster carers or not. The ADM also has the responsibility of determining the continued suitability of foster carers following completion of annual reviews of foster carers and recommendation from the Fostering Panel. The ADM meets with the Panel Chair several times a year and observes the panel at least once a year, the last occasion being January 2024.

4.8 Training and Support for Foster Carers

4.8.1 The Brent CYP Learning Academy (formally known as the CYP Learning and Development Team) within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service continues to offer learning opportunities for new and experienced foster carers and connected persons carers utilising different delivery methods such as face-to-face, online/virtual and E-Learning. Most sessions continue to be online in accordance the carer's preference.

4.8.2 During this reporting period, 14 learning sessions were attended by carers which included 3 workshops via Brent Safeguarding Partnership, and 6 attended jointly by wider CYP practitioners. The 5 remaining sessions were fostering specific: Paediatric First Aid for Foster Carers; Restorative Practice Approach for Foster carers; Contextual Safeguarding Training for Foster Carers; Safer Caring Training; Young Gaming and Gambling Awareness Workshop for carers.

4.8.3 The participation rates for facilitated learning sessions have remains relatively unchanged. However, there has been an increase in bookings to attendance ratio meaning significant reduction in non-attendance to booked session. As previously highlighted, low attendance at training sessions is a national issue affecting many local authorities, and Brent is no exception. The Brent CYP Learning Academy continue to promote and encourage participation by carers in mandatory trainings through regular reminders. The Fostering Panel also monitor and scrutinise the foster carers' training attendance and hold carers to account if the carers are not compliant with this requirement. Since the last reporting period, a new system of tracking Fostering training using our performance dashboard has assisted with improved identification of carers who have not completed or have overdue mandatory training. This has resulted in increased completion of mandatory trainings such as First Aid, Safeguarding, and Safer Caring.

4.8.4 It should also be noted that as our support increases and improves, we will be offering different development opportunities for carers as part of our

therapeutic offer and the Mockingbird model, and therefore a higher expectation of carers in relation to their commitment and engagement with learning opportunities will be expected.

- 4.8.5 As part of strengthening relationships, improving the quality of care for children and young people in care, and promoting multi-agency learning, all our carers continue to have access to learning opportunities via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership, multi-agency learning and development offer, as well as the wider Brent CYP practitioners training offer. Attachment and Child Development, and WRAP: Concerned with Radicalisation are some of the wider CYP practitioner training that carers have attended during this reporting period.
- 4.8.6 The training offer is regularly reviewed to ensure that the foster carers continue to develop their professional skills, deepen their understanding of the child looked after's needs, and can keep abreast with new findings, research, and learnings from serious case reviews.
- 4.8.7 In addition to facilitated learning opportunities, the Brent CYP Learning Academy continued to provide all carers access to learning opportunities at any time of the day, evenings, and weekends, through access to an online E-Learning courses package. We have moved to a new provider since the last report. The benefit of this new provider is that all the courses are now CPD accredited, subscriptions are based on the number of learners, not courses thus one learner can choose to complete all available courses at no extra cost to the local authority. Since the move to this new provider in May 2024, there has been a notable increase in carer's engagement with the E-Learning courses. There are some limits on the completion of E-Learning courses by carers with some reasons being carers not having access to a computer. We anticipate this will improve as carers access the Brent digital offer.

Feedback from participants:

For the Young Gaming and Gambling Awareness workshop for carers, in response to evaluation question "***From what you learned, what do you plan to apply to your role as a carer?***"

"Understand why a child might gamble or game excessively and recognize if a child might have an addiction to both."

"To become more involved when the child is playing a game, by asking questions. I.e. how is the game played? what is the goal? Does it involve other online players? Explain the risk of becoming addicted, whilst giving recognition to their skills in playing the game. Monitor the time the child is playing a game. Before the game becomes an addiction, I would discuss with the child restricted access times. Involving them in the decision making of the agreed times."

"Having conversations about the risk how it can affect them and giving tips and monitoring them."

For training Restorative Practice Approach for Foster carers, in response to evaluation question “***From what you learned, what do you plan to apply to your role as a carer?***”

“Encourage restorative practice wherever possible in the event of conflict situations.”

4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

4.9.1 During the reporting period, there were no allegations made against Brent foster carers and no complaints received in relation to foster carers.

4.9.2 The Fostering and Kinship Teams received numerous positive comments from foster carers during assessments, annual reviews and from other colleagues and professionals. The practitioners’ achievements and good practice continued to be acknowledged and celebrated at the bi-monthly LAC and Permanency Forums. Additionally, the Fostering Panel provides feedback to practitioners on the quality of the reports and their presentation at panel.

For one practitioner, Panel fed back that “*the report and verbal presentation were excellent. The report was comprehensive, a joy to read, clear, and concise.*”

4.9.3 There have been **40** annual reviews completed in this reporting period.

4.9.4 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) for fostering conduct all the annual reviews of foster carers, ensuring impartiality and providing a safeguarding mechanism for both the child and the carer. The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer also completes Standards of Care Review meetings, where concerns have been identified regarding carers. This allows a level of independence from the Fostering Service, and the officer will then take these to Fostering Panel where appropriate for fuller discussion and recommendations on continued approval.

Service Development

5.0 Kinship Care

5.1 The sign off for our updated Kinship Care and Support policy has been delayed, as we wanted to ensure that we had fully considered this policy in light of the recent National Kinship Strategy. This is in final stages and will be finalised and published by the end of October 2024.

The National Kinship Strategy outlines a number of positive steps to better support the development of kinship arrangements, however, there is a lot of detail to work through. The Kinship care team are continuing to work with the Kinship Care Peer Volunteer, Virtual school, HR and other external organisations to promote the voice and interests of Kinship carers in Brent and to implement the government plans as set up in the new strategy.

- 5.2 The other priority for this area of work in the next reporting period will be to finalise the work started on redesigning our website page, to make it more user friendly and informative for kinship carers.
- 5.3 The Kinship Care Team continues to work closely with Brent Health Matters and Brent Community Engagement team to raise awareness of the various kinship care arrangements in the community and share information about the support available to the carers through statutory and voluntary agencies.

6.0 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

- 6.1 The Fostering Service continues to remain committed to enhance the support offered to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers by including a therapeutic element to support placement stability.
- 6.2 Anna Freud has been commissioned to provide a targeted mental health via Brent WEST service and emotional wellbeing service for vulnerable children and young people in the Brent as well as support foster carers and kinship carers through consultations and Reflective Carers' Groups.
- 6.3 In addition to individual work with children, young people and carers, WEST also ran the Reflective Fostering programme twice in the 2023-24 academic year. The sessions are facilitated by a WEST Child and Family Specialist. 6 carers have completed the full programme over the last 12-month period. The next programme will run in Nov/Dec 2024.

The content includes:

- Mentalising for self and others and techniques to support this.
- An exploration of the carers' experience of being parented/cared for and how this influences their approach to caring.
- Overview of trauma and how this impacts emotions and behaviour.

Outcome measures show an increase in carers' mental wellbeing and an increase in carers' interest and curiosity about their child's mental states, indicating an increase in mentalizing and reflective capacities.

Feedback from carers:

"I have noticed that I am doing more mind checking and it's really helping."

"This course has awakened a lot of thoughts of mindfulness and how to stop and pause. I feel that I grew as a human being."

"I was looking forward to Wednesday mornings. With you I could be a little bit soft with my heart and find solutions to my problems."

"Because we have the opportunity to share our experiences, I now don't feel alone."

"I can talk without being judged. There are things I can talk about which I

can't talk about with other grandmothers."

- 6.4 The Looked After Children's Resilience Service (LRS) test and learn project was launched in January 2024. This is a preventative approach, using CAMHS provider collaborative funding and was tested until July 2024 in Brent and then expanded to include the Shared Fostering Services for Hammersmith and Fulham, Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea from September 2024. It will replicate the system-wide approach of the Hospital Discharge Service programme to support, train and further upskill Brent foster carers, identified IFA carers and further local residential children's homes through bespoke training and in-reach placement support so that children and young people with mental health needs can be more effectively met. Work with foster carers will seek to reduce the number of fostering placement breakdowns that result in higher-cost residential placements.
- 6.5 To date the LRS has received 19 referrals for children aged between 4 to 16, with positive outcomes related to stabilising and avoiding placement breakdowns. The next reporting period will see the LRS training extended and delivered to SSW and CSW in Brent so that the content/tools can be reinforced by the whole professional network and benefit all carers, not just those who are working with LRS.

7.0 Recruitment and retention

- 7.1 Recruitment and retention remains the key priority for the fostering service, and this reporting period has seen significant activity and efforts to improve both the recruitment of new foster carers and the retention of the carers we have.
- 7.2 In order to increase the number of in-house foster carers and to reach parity with the other neighbouring boroughs, Brent renewed our Fostering Offer which was launched in April 2024. Please refer to section 4.4.3.

The new offer information is available on our website and has been sent out to all carers via Supervising Social Workers, Foster Carer newsletter and HOS communication. It has also been shared at Support Groups and at Reference Group meetings.

The digital offer has been positively received with 34 carers receiving a laptop or tablet to date. 30 carers are awaiting delivery of a device.

- 7.3 The service is working with Brent Leisure colleagues to ensure carers have access to free and reduced cost leisure facilities and activities around the borough. We are simultaneously working on a proposal with Leisure to test out impact and effectiveness of free gym and swim access for foster carers.
- 7.4 Brent is officially a "Fostering Friendly" local authority. 'Fostering Friendly' is The Fostering Network's programme to encourage employers to support fostering, and in particular, foster carers. As an employer who is a member of this programme, Brent have made sure that we have in place a fostering

friendly HR policy for all foster carers in the council's employment (regardless of their fostering service)

A marketing campaign is being designed currently to raise awareness of our Fostering Friendly status and to promote fostering for Brent within our council staff group during the autumn term which will result in more fostering applications from Brent employees.

- 7.5 The Fostering Service are currently working towards implementing and launching the first Mockingbird constellation. The Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model where mockingbird hub carers are specially trained to offer sleepovers, peer support, emergency support, joint planning and social activities to fostering homes. Mockingbird supports children and foster carers by creating extended communities of support around the child and their fostering family.

The service is currently working hard to recruit a Home Hub carer. The role of the Mockingbird hub carer is crucial to the success of the programme, and it has been challenging to identify an inhouse carer who is able to take on this rewarding role. The primary reasons for this are: no suitable space, work, have long term children in placement. Moving forward we are expanding efforts to recruit to this role by considering prospective carers with previous fostering experience, kinship carers, and we are also advertising externally.

- 7.6 Following the success of the 'Any of Us' CAN Digital project in 2023, Brent have continued to work with CAN Digital and over 100 other councils and children's trusts this year to produce a new film called 'Everyone' to promote Local Authority fostering. This film will appeal to a wide audience and will add to our marketing resources and encourage people to foster for Brent. The film will be launched nationally in Birmingham in October 2024, and will be shared with Corporate Parenting Committee members.

8.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 8.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.
- 8.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their SSW, Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Support Groups and Foster Carer Reference Group. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on their experiences of assessment and panel process.
- 8.3 Children and young people provide feedback through discussions with their social worker, IRO, or their carers SSW, Looked After Children Reviews, written feedback for Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, Care in Action/Participation activities, Brent Care Journeys.

9.0 Financial Considerations

9.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report.

10.0 Legal Considerations

10.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

11.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

11.1 There are currently no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

12.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

12.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

13.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

13.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

14.0 Communication Considerations

14.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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